

GANGSTERISM AND SOCIAL

DYSFUNCTION IN THE WESTERN CAPE



Edited by Hein Willemse

JDC Opinion and Review

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Gangsterism and Social Dysfunction in the Western Cape
Proceedings of a Jaap Durand Seminar
Edited by Hein Willemsse

JDC Opinion and Review 2



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Cover: © Jeffrey Abrahams. *Day 110 Lockdown*, part of his series *Cape Town under lockdown* (2020): “Only two of these boys in Lotus River, Cape Town go to school. The others say they are missing it and missing their friends. There’s not much for them to do during the day, but after school they all play together in the park near their homes.”

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Gangsterism and Social Dysfunction in the Western Cape brings together the proceedings of a Jaap Durand Chair Seminar held on 18 March 2026 at the University of the Western Cape. The event was jointly sponsored by the Jaap Durand Chair and the Research Chair in Gender, Transformation and World-making in the Faculty of Law at the University of the Western Cape in association with the Cape Crime Crisis Coalition. The *JDC Opinion and Review Series* draws on concise position papers addressing topical issues, originally presented as part of the Jaap Durand Chair Seminars.

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Imraahn Ismail-Mukaddam is a community activist, consumer rights advocate, and public safety leader. He gained national prominence in 2007 for exposing the bread price-fixing cartel, a landmark moment in South Africa's consumer rights history. He served as Advocacy Director of the National Consumer Forum (2010–2014), leading campaigns on fair pricing, corporate accountability, and consumer education. He has also dedicated over 15 years to the Elsies River Community Policing Forum. He is currently Chief Executive Officer of Inspire Network, a media and community engagement platform focused on amplifying local voices and strengthening civic participation.

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Hein Willemse is Emeritus Professor of Afrikaans and Literary Theory and former Head of Department at the University of Pretoria. He has held visiting professorships at universities locally and internationally, including in Africa, Europe, and the Americas. He is the inaugural holder of the Jaap Durand Chair (2025–26) at the University of the Western Cape.

SECTION A

Words of welcome

1

Towards shaping an equitable and inclusive society

Hein Willemse

Jaap Durand Professor 2025-26
University of the Western Cape

It is my privilege, as the inaugural holder of the university-wide Jaap Durand Chair to welcome you to this important Seminar on "Gangsterism and Social Dysfunction in the Western Cape".

The Jaap Durand Chair is guided by the vision of working towards a just, participatory, and sustainable society. This is not merely an abstract aspiration. It is a call to action, one that resonates deeply with the intellectual and moral legacy of Jaap Durand, whose life and work were marked by a steadfast commitment to justice, inclusion, and transformation.

Professor Durand understood that meaningful change within institutions and society does not occur in isolation or

from above. At the University of the Western Cape, during a period of profound political transition in the 1980s and early 1990s, he helped to cultivate an integrated and inclusive intellectual environment, one shaped not only by academic leadership, but also by the inclusion of students' voices and those of young people. He valued dialogue, and cultivated a shared commitment to relevance and social justice. That legacy continues to guide us.

It is in this spirit that I approached my co-host Prof Karin van Marle and her Gender, Transformation, Worldmaking Research Chair, Faculty of Law, and Dr Llewellyn MacMaster and Prof Irvin Kinnes of the Cape Crime Crises Coali-



Prof Hein Willemse
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I see today's Seminar as a modest but important opportunity to contribute to shaping an equitable and inclusive society.

We gather at a time when gang violence, rising numbers of violent deaths, and the expansion of organised crime in the Western Cape and elsewhere in the country weigh heavily on our communities. These are not isolated phenomena, they are systemic, rooted in poverty, inequality, historical injustice since colonial times, and social neglect. Their consequences are devastating, not only in the loss of life, but in the erosion of the social fabric that binds communities together.

I don't need to tell you that gang-related violence in the Western Cape Province, is deeply entrenched, gangs themselves have become intergenerational institutions. This violence is rooted in broader historical

and socio-economic conditions shaped by colonial and apartheid-era spatial planning, which produced marginalised communities marked by poverty, unemployment, and limited access to services.

Gangs operate structured networks with territorial control, engaging in the drug trade, while competition over these markets fuels ongoing turf wars. Organised crime extends beyond street gangs to include drug trafficking syndicates, extortion, and illegal firearms, sometimes intersecting with corruption and weaknesses in law enforcement.

It is heart-breaking to see young people lose their lives, or at the very least destroy whatever potential they had. It is equally disconcerting that a fair number of police stations in this province consistently records some of the highest murder rates in South Africa, with

especially young people, often caught in the crossfire.

While policing interventions have had limited success, there is growing recognition that sustainable solutions require coordinated, multi-sectoral responses that address underlying inequalities, strengthen community structures, and create viable alternatives for at-risk youth.

Gangsterism cannot be reduced to a simple law-and-order problem. It is complex, multi-layered, and demands a multidisciplinary response, in which affected communities play a crucial role.

Our Seminar, therefore, is not intended as an endpoint of analysis. Rather, it is structured as a movement, from diagnosis, to dialogue, to direction, and ultimately to action.

Our objectives today are clear:

- to deepen our understanding of the social dysfunction underlying gangsterism;
- to interrogate the failures within existing systems of governance and justice;
- to create meaningful dialogue across sectors that too often operate in isolation;
- to provide a platform for the voices of affected communities to be heard; and
- to begin charting practical, collaborative pathways forward.

The strength of this gathering, colleagues, and distinguished guests, lies precisely in its diversity. Here gathered today are representatives from faith communities, civil society, law enforcement, academia, government, and, importantly, communities directly

affected by violence. It is only through such collective engagement that we can begin to imagine sustainable responses.

Let me state this clearly, Mr Rector, the University cannot stand apart from the crises that shape the lives of the people it serves. Institutions of learning must be embedded in their societies, responsive to their challenges, and accountable to their futures.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you all for your presence, your willingness to engage, and your commitment to this shared task.

Let us proceed, not only to reflect, but to act.

With the publication of the edited transcripts of the presentations, I wish to express my gratitude to the Jaap Durand Steering Committee, under the leadership of Profs Fatima Moolla, Ernst Conradie, and Lois Dippenaar, as well as to the Rector, Prof Robert Balfour, for their sustained interest in and support of our work. Karla van Marle, Llewellyn MacMaster, and Irvin Kinnes were unwavering in their encouragement of the project, while Lloyd Zanna Rex Chetty managed the additional administrative demands I imposed with quiet efficiency.

On the day of the event, Adelaide Ensai, Caitlin Veldsman, Imke Daniels, Johnmark Solomon, Lee-Anne Munro, and Masentle Khanyetsi ensured that everything ran seamlessly. Sergio Croy from UWC Audio Visual Services recorded the proceedings, creating a valuable archive of the event, and the University's security services carried out their duties with unobtrusive professionalism.

2

‘For still possible communities’

Karin van Marle

Professor of Law
Research Chair Gender, Transformation, Worldmaking
Faculty of Law, University of the Western Cape

I never had the privilege of meeting Prof Jaap Durand but I admired his support and commitment to not only the abstract idea of the public university, but specifically to the University of the Western Cape as a space of and for contestation and critical thought over many years. Prof Hein Willemse and I worked at the University of Pretoria at more or less the same time and although I read his work I never had the opportunity to collaborate with him. I was very happy that our paths have crossed here and honoured to be co-hosting this event with him.

This event was his brain child and initiative but I immediately realised that

the theme and urgency of it speak to the aims and spirit of the Research Chair in Gender, Transformation and Worldmaking and therefore supported it wholeheartedly:

- From a *gender* perspective the "precarity" (Butler, 2004) of the social crisis that the seminar addressed affects women and all vulnerable gender identities;
- It was clear to me that the *transformation* needed must go much deeper and far beyond mere reform on the level of policy change.
- From a *worldmaking* perspective the words of Donna Haraway, "for still



Prof Karin van Marle
Screen grab, Jaap Durand Chair video, UWC

possible worlds" as quoted in an article sent to me recently by a young colleague¹ after sharing our despair about what is going on in the world, were apt.

Natalie Osborne (2019: 145) in an article titled "For Still Possible Cities: A Politics of Failure for the Politically Depressed" reflects on Arundhati Roy's notion that "another world – *our* world – was on her way" and asks if we shouldn't concede that "We. Have. Lost." Drawing on the work on "political depression" she finds guidance from the "ruins" that we find ourselves in. "We failed to save The World, but there are other, subaltern worlds here, accessible if we attend and care for them" (Osborne, 2019: 147). The author turns to the phrases below by Donna Haraway that for me speak directly to the theme of this seminar:

- "staying with the trouble" – placing the violence associated with gangsterism under the spotlight most definitely stays with the trouble;

- "we have little time" – underscores the urgency of the matter, so many lives being lost every day.

The words above were my words of welcome. The day's presentations and lively discussions, the statistics, the stories, the raw emotions, but also the enduring commitment to and hope for change related specifically also to

- "for still possible worlds" – the manifold possibilities to do better.

Note

¹ My gratitude to Dr Hugo Uys for sending this article (as well as many others) to me at the right time.

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Welcoming address

Robert J. Balfour

Rector and Vice-Chancellor
University of the Western Cape

Introduction and context

Good morning everyone, and welcome to UWC. Thank you to Professors Hein Willemse, Jaap Durand Chair as also the co-host Prof Karin van Marle from UWC. The importance of UWC as a space in which to bring together members of the community and University with a view to debating new ideas that can, with hope and energy, lead to new solutions, cannot be understated. The University should be that place where society's leadership wants to come to reflect, engage, and determine in solidarity ways forward that serve to uplift and transform our society more

broadly and our communities, more particularly.

I am heartened that we have among us, given the pressing nature of this topic, prominent leaders from civic society, law enforcement, communities, faith communities and academics together. All of us are touched by gangsterism, all should be seized with the need to address it.

SAPS Brigadiers Dyantyi and Hartzenburg, thank you for taking time out of your schedules to engage with us. We have also The Cape Crime Crisis Coalition present, the Bonteheuwel Development Forum, board members from the National Community Police Forum, Mullah Dr



Prof Robert J. Balfour
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Omar from Claremont Mosque, Inspire Elsie's River, as also Pastor Engel from CeaseFire in Hanover Park. I see in our audience too, leaders from our Faculties and executive present, student leaders and our colleagues. Thank you all for choosing UWC and the occasion facilitated by this important Chair in the name of Jaap Durand who stood as a moral compass for the University

and its communities in very dark days. I wonder what Professor Durand would have said and felt about this matter.

In the Western Cape, violence and insecurity are part of everyday life in too many communities. So is neglect, whether in the form of poor services, weak protection, or limited opportunities. This conversation today is about those lived conditions. It is also about the questions of justice and social response that arise from them (UWC, 2026a; UWC, 2026c). South African scholarship has shown that these conditions cannot be separated from longer histories of inequality and exclusion. Those histories still influence where violence is concentrated, how it is experienced, and how

communities carry its effects (Pillay, Pillay and Sibanda, 2024; Van der West-huizen and Gawulayo, 2021). There is not a day in our media in which there are re-ports of gangster related violence, and the ratcheting up of numbers of killings suggests to us that the issue is far from under control. There is also every week in the news, articles about young people and substance dependence and abuse.

Often this occurs within schools in our communities.

This seminar also builds on important work done last year, when the Jaap Durand Chair and the Annual Lecture were launched at UWC. The previous Jaap Durand events helped establish this Chair and Annual Lecture as spaces for thoughtful public engagement. They created room for serious engagement with issues of justice and social responsibility. They brought Professor Jaap Durand's moral clarity into focus. They also drew attention to his contribution to UWC.

Equally important, they returned us to his belief that institutions must stay close to the realities people face in their daily lives (UWC, 2024). The media reports about violence and substance abuse in respect of our public institutions, suggests to us that institutions are not always the safer-spaces they need to be. Sometimes the grooming for gangs is seen to begin in schools, and with the types of activities to which learners have access after-hours. We recognise that the after-hours programmes need to be strong enough to promote healthy socialisation, rather than function as the breeding grounds for grooming practices.

This year, we continue that work in a more specific and practical way. The seminar turns our attention to gangsterism and social dysfunction in the Western Cape. It asks what Professor Jaap Durand's legacy calls for in the face of this crisis, and how universities, faith communities, civic

organisations, the state and affected communities might respond together (UWC, 2026a; UWC, 2026b).

Why this conversation is needed now

The purpose of the seminar reaches further than describing gangsterism as a problem. It calls for a closer look at the wider social dysfunction that sustains it. That includes poverty, social exclusion, weak support systems and institutional failure. It asks us to consider failures in the state and in the criminal justice system. It also asks how practical action, stronger partnerships and real commitment might follow from this conversation (UWC, 2026b; UWC, 2026c).

This concern is well grounded in South African scholarship. Cano et al. (2023) show that enforcement on its own does not produce lasting change. Their work on the army deployment in the Cape Flats points to the limits of a narrow security response. Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo (2021) make a related point from a different perspective. Their work shows how gang involvement is tied to family strain, social exclusion, poverty, weak support systems and the conditions young people grow up in. What these studies show is that gangsterism cannot be reduced to criminality alone. It has to be understood in relation to wider social and institutional conditions. This last point is apposite this morning because gangs are social institutions. We can see that the rituals for belonging, those practices regarded as grooming

draw on a deep need for social cohesion, for safety, security and recognition. Distortions as gangs may be regarded, they nevertheless reflect the incoherence of society and the displacement of social values so critical to building healthy community.

Many of us in this room may have seen how quickly public conversations on crime can narrow. The focus often falls on enforcement alone. The everyday realities of families, young people and neighbourhoods then receive less attention. That is why it is important that this room brings together citizens, community leaders, faith voices, scholars, practitioners and public institutions in one conversation (UWC, 2026b; UWC, 2026c). Faith institutions are important. We know from studies in sociology that societies in which there are strong faith communities are not without their challenges, but societies where there are few faith communities abound in challenges. Despite the differences between creed and belief systems, coming together today is a recognition of how much we in fact have in common, rather than what divides us.

I also value the way this seminar has been convened. The Jaap Durand Chair, the Research Chair in Gender, Transformation and Worldmaking in the Faculty of Law, and the Cape Crime Crisis Coalition have come together around a shared concern (UWC, 2026c). That is important because no single sector can

understand or respond to this problem on its own, and as I noted, UWC should be that place where the widest range of civic, social academic, and government bodies come together to tackle the challenge together. Indeed “tackling together” is how we can maximise on the problems that seem to undermine interventions from the outset: a need for coordination, for leadership, for resources in a context where the constraints are severe.

What experience teaches us

A crisis of this kind does not arise on its own. On the Cape Flats, it is tied to long histories of inequality and exclusion. It is also tied to economic pressure, weak support systems and mistrust in institutions. Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo (2021), writing on youth gang involvement on the Cape Flats, show clearly that gang affiliation is bound up with family strain, poverty, social exclusion and the conditions in which young people grow up. That is why this conversation has to ask deeper questions. It has to ask how this crisis has been framed, who gets to name it, where the state has failed, and what real collaboration would look like in practice (UWC, 2026a; UWC, 2026b). What roles can education institutions play as safer spaces, what more is needed to strengthen these institutions, and other community coalitions that seek to contribute meaningfully to lasting change.

Not working together also has consequences for us. Individual excellence in the context of social dysfunction, has minimal impact.

Silos have real effects of limiting our energy, reach and potential. When institutions work apart, communities feel it directly, and communities fall apart when institutions don't seem to work like a part of the social fabric, but function instead apart from it. When dialogue is missing, distrust grows. When people are spoken about but not listened to, policy loses force.

That is one reason this conversation is so important at UWC. Our role as a university is to create space for serious public engagement. It is to support evidence-informed dialogue and to connect academic work to the realities people live with. Saidi (2023), writing on community engagement in South African higher education, argues that universities carry a social responsibility to engage meaningfully with the communities they serve. That understanding is especially relevant here. For those of us involved in leadership work, it calls for listening, partnership and accountability. For UWC, it confirms that part of our public role is to convene difficult conversations with honesty and care.

Closing reflections

Today, all of us here are part of a wider conversation about how a society responds when violence becomes part of everyday life. We are considering what it means when some communities carry heavier burdens than others, and when institutions are called on to rebuild trust.

That is one of the reasons this seminar connects so strongly with the

launch of the Jaap Durand Chair last year. It brings us back to values that many in this room will recognise as central to Professor Durand's contribution to UWC. These include moral seriousness, intellectual courage, and a refusal to look away from injustice (UWC, 2024). Those values remain important to the work of this seminar. They also help explain why it is held in his name.

I wish to thank Professors Hein and Karin and all of you, our organising team, our partner institutions and organisations, the speakers, and everyone who has joined us today. I also acknowledge those from affected communities who are here with us. Your presence keeps this conversation grounded in lived reality.

My hope is that today will be honest in its diagnosis, careful in its listening, and practical in what it makes possible. My hope, too, is that it will help all of us move towards forms of justice and social responsibility that speak to the realities our communities face.

Thank you.

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SECTION B

Framing the crisis

The three presentations by Imraahn Ismail-Mukaddam, Pastor Craven Engel, and Hilton Arendse converge on a clear and unsettling conclusion: there is indeed a crisis of gangsterism in the Western Cape, but this crisis cannot be understood narrowly as a problem of crime alone. Rather, it must be framed, socially and ethically, as a manifestation of deep and layered social dysfunction, produced by structural inequality, institutional failure, and fractured community life. Taken together, the presentations shift the analytical lens from gangs as discrete criminal entities to gangsterism as a symptom of systemic breakdown.

Ismail-Mukaddam's analysis is particularly stark in this regard. He identifies a "pipeline" from school attrition to crime, demonstrating that gangsterism is not an accidental or isolated outcome but the predictable result of a failing social system. The education system, while superficially functional, is shown to be structurally

porous: the 30% of learners who drop out are not merely "lost" but are actively absorbed into cycles of vulnerability and criminality. This process is gendered, young men are drawn into gangs through delinquency, while young women are pushed into early pregnancy and socio-economic marginalisation, but both trajectories lead to exclusion from the formal economy and increased exposure to crime. The ethical implication is profound: a society that allows such predictable pathways is complicit in reproducing the very violence it seeks to control.

Engel's intervention, grounded in practice through the CeaseFire project, reinforces this systemic understanding while offering a different ethical vocabulary. By reframing "gang members" as "high-risk individuals" and "shooters" as "transporters of violence," he deliberately disrupts stigmatising discourses that reduce individuals to criminal identities. This linguistic shift reflects a deeper ethical stance: violence

is treated as contagion, spreading through social networks and environments rather than emanating from inherently deviant individuals. His account of “environmental contamination” is particularly telling, many individuals do not choose gangsterism; rather, it is imposed by conditions of poverty, exposure to violence, and fractured family structures. Even where agency is present (“behavioural contamination”), it is exercised within a context that normalises and rewards violence.

Engel’s work also exposes the limits of traditional law enforcement. Policing arrives too late; prisons function as “universities” of gangsterism; and the fragmentation of gangs into smaller, leaderless units has made suppression strategies less effective. Instead, his approach foregrounds social crime prevention: interrupting violence through credible community actors, rebuilding family systems, and creating alternative forms of belonging and identity. Ethically, this represents a move away from punitive justice toward a model rooted in care, restoration, and behavioural transformation.

Arendse’s contribution situates these dynamics within a broader governmental and policy framework, explicitly naming the issue as one of social dysfunction across multiple levels. At the individual level, trauma, substance abuse, and the normalisation of violence erode personal agency. At the relational level, weakened family structures and permissive attitudes toward violence undermine social cohesion. At the societal level, spatial inequality, unemployment, and poor education create fertile ground

for gang formation. Finally, at the systemic level, failures in law enforcement and governance perpetuate the cycle. This multi-layered diagnosis confirms that gangsterism is not merely a crisis of security but a crisis of social order and moral community.

Importantly, Arendse challenges the adequacy of militarised or enforcement-heavy responses. The call for deploying the army, for instance, is rejected as a superficial intervention that leaves underlying risks intact. Instead, he advocates for an integrated, “whole-of-government” approach that prioritises early intervention, youth development, and economic opportunity. The emphasis on coordination, between government departments, communities, and civil society, highlights another dimension of the crisis: fragmentation itself. Disjointed efforts, competing community structures, and siloed governance reproduce inefficiency and weaken collective responses to violence.

Across all three presentations, a consistent ethical thread emerges: gangsterism is both produced by and productive of social injustice. It flourishes where communities are deprived of safety, dignity, and opportunity, and where institutions fail to protect and nurture the vulnerable. The crisis, therefore, is not only empirical (rising violence, recruitment of youth, normalisation of crime) but also normative: it reflects a breakdown in the values, relationships, and structures that sustain a just society.

At the same time, the contributions resist fatalism. Each points toward the possibility of transformation through preventative, community-based, and

relational interventions. Whether through restoring safe school environments, interrupting cycles of violence, or building integrated development programmes, the emphasis is on reclaiming the social fabric. The ethical challenge is to reimagine safety not as control imposed from above, but as a condition co-produced through care, inclusion, and shared responsibility.

In conclusion, the crisis of gangsterism in the Western Cape is real

and urgent, but it is misdiagnosed if reduced to crime alone. It is, more fundamentally, a crisis of social dysfunction, rooted in historical injustice, sustained by institutional fragmentation, and expressed through the everyday vulnerabilities of youth and communities. Addressing it requires not only policing, but a sustained ethical and social commitment to rebuilding the conditions under which human flourishing becomes possible.

4

The gendered pipeline from classroom to crime

Imraahn Ismail-Mukaddam

Chief Executive Officer
Inspire Network, Elsies River

The Western Cape education system faces a systemic crisis where school attrition functions as a primary feeder for social instability and organised crime. While the province maintains a nationally superior retention rate of 70%, the remaining 30% of "lost" learners represent a significant social and economic crisis. This paper argues that dropping out is not a random event but a prolonged process of disengagement with distinct, gendered paths. For males, the trajectory is often defined by externalising behaviours leading to delinquency and gang affiliation. For females, it is frequently an internalising or socio-biological event – pregnancy and subsequent caregiving. Both paths,

however, converge on a permanent exit from the formal economy and a high probability of involvement in the criminal justice system. By synthesising current statistics on male dropout and teenage pregnancy with a paradigm shift toward "behavioural intelligence" and "community-led safety," this paper argues for a multi-departmental intervention strategy that treats school safety and reproductive health as fundamental pillars of educational success.

The problem statement: The attrition-to-abuse pipeline

In the Western Cape, dropping out is rarely a gender-neutral event. The journey from the classroom to the gang

or to chronic vulnerability begins with disengagement, often manifested as chronic absenteeism or untreated behavioural shifts. This "safety gap" has been critically exacerbated by the suspension of community-led programmes like the "Walking Bus" and "Bambanani" due to budget reallocations and political friction. Without these safe corridors, male learners are more easily intercepted by gangs, and female learners are more vulnerable to sexual predation on their way to and from school. The current system is failing due to a "silo" effect, where security gaps and identification gaps persist because teachers are trained to identify academic failure but lack the specialised training to spot the behavioural markers that signal a learner is at risk.

The gendered divergence of dropout

The male attrition crisis: Grades 9 to 12

The "male-flight" from the education system becomes most acute in the FET (Further Education and Training) phase. While the province-wide retention rate is 70%, gender-disaggregated data shows that males are 12% more likely to drop out before reaching Grade 12. In high-risk districts (e.g., Metro East), approximately 1 in 4 males who enter Grade 9 do not complete Grade 12. The delinquency link is stark: research indicates that 65% of youth offenders in Western Cape correctional facilities dropped out of school between Grades 9 and 11 (Toska et al.). The transition from behavioural warning signs to "hard delinquency" often occurs within six months of dropping out.

Teenage pregnancy: The silent exit for females

Teenage pregnancy remains one of the most significant disruptors of female education (see Toska et al.). Recent Department of Health data recorded 10,277 deliveries to mothers aged 11–19 in the Western Cape for the 2024/2025 period, with the City of Cape Town accounting for nearly 6,000 of these cases (Serra, see also Magubane). While pregnancy itself is not a crime, the factors surrounding it often are. Statutory rape is a major driver, with many pregnancies in the 10–14 age group involving adult perpetrators (Serra). Furthermore, there is a growing link between adolescent pregnancy and "delinquent peer associations," where young women in gang-heavy areas seek "protection" through relationships with gang members, leading to pregnancy as a byproduct of a survival strategy (Commission for Gender Equality, see also Brown et al.;).

The 'December danger': Long school breaks as recruitment windows

The risk escalates dramatically when school gates close. The "institutional rhythm" that occupies a child from morning to afternoon vanishes, and in households with absent guardians, learners are left to the "governance of the street" (see Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime). Gang syndicates strategically use this vacuum to accelerate recruitment through:

- *The 'provision' trap:* In the absence of the National School Nutrition Programme, gangs step in as providers, offering meals or cash for "favours" that escalate into criminal tasks.



Mr Imraahn Ismail-Mukaddam

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- *The 'Brotherhood' appeal:* With no extra-mural clubs active, the gang becomes the primary social structure, offering belonging and identity to bored, unsupervised adolescents.
- *Normalisation of violence:* Gang activity spills into play areas, normalising the presence of firearms and illicit trade to younger children.

Behavioural intelligence: Early identification of vulnerability

To reverse these trends, schools must transition from passive observers to active "intelligence hubs". Effective intervention must move beyond tracking grades to monitoring Behavioural Pattern Awareness (see Heller et al.).

- *Staff and peer training:* Teachers must be trained to identify "pre-delinquent" and "high-risk" markers such as chronic bullying, vulgar language, and substance use – which are often "cries for help" or signs of escalating gang influence.
- *Peer-led identification:* School prefects and RCL (Representative Council of Learners) members occupy the "social frontlines". Training these student leaders to identify peers being groomed by gangs or showing sudden shifts in behaviour (e.g., signs of pregnancy or withdrawal) allows for low-stakes intervention before a student reaches the disciplinary committee.
- *Comprehensive gang intelligence:* Schools must have access to localised data on gang prevalence and recruitment tactics. Understanding the "territoriality" of the school's surroundings allows for better coordination with Community Police

Forums (CPFs) and School Safety Committees.

Proposed solutions: Re-integrating the community

The Western Cape cannot rely solely on classroom interventions; it must resurrect and expand its community-led support through a "Whole-of-Government" approach (see Parliamentary Monitoring Group).

- *Refund 'safe passage' (Walking Bus e3 Bambanani)*: These programmes must be treated as non-negotiable infrastructure. The fiscal cost of a community stipend for a volunteer is negligible compared to the state's expenditure on a single incarcerated youth (approx. R180,000 per annum). Their presence significantly reduces opportunities for gang recruitment of males and the sexual harassment of females.
- *Establish multi-departmental 'social anchors'*: * Department of Cultural Affairs & Sport (DCAS): Re-invest in township school facilities and MOD centres. "A child in sport is a child out of court." High-risk schools must be prioritised.
*Department of Social Development (DSD): Create immediate referral systems for learners identified by the Behavioural Intelligence model (see Heller et al.). Psychosocial support must be proactive, not a response to a crisis (Lichand and Christen).
- *Empower community structures*: There must be a formal mandate for cooperation between the Community Police Forum (CPF), School Governing Bodies (SGBs), and School Safety Committees. This synergy allows for greater parental

account-ability for truancy; while also providing support groups for young mothers to

- ensure they return to school (see Safer South Africa Foundation).
- *Implement mandatory holiday programmes*: Inter-departmental funding must be directed toward structured 6-week December break programmes that provide meals, safety, and structured recreation (Sports/Arts). This prevents the "holiday slide" into crime and unprotected sex, keeping vulnerable youth under positive supervision.

Conclusion: The economic rationale

The cost of maintaining a learner in school through stipends for "walking buses", sports coaches, and extra social workers is a fraction of the cost of managing the fallout of dropout. A 10% increase in male retention and a 15% reduction in adolescent pregnancy would lead to a measurable, multi-billion Rand saving in policing, healthcare, and correctional services over the next decade. The Western Cape cannot police its way out of a gang crisis while the education system "leaks" thousands of vulnerable youths annually.¹ By shifting focus toward early behavioural identification, community-led safety, and aggressive extra-mural investment, the province can dismantle the "dropout-to-gang" pipeline and provide a competitive alternative to the lure of the streets.²

Notes

¹ For our work, see Inspire Network NPO
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/259845209335164/>.

² Deep Seek AI was used in the preparation of this article.

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5

Meeting the crisis in Hanover Park

Craven Engel

Pastor, Chief Executive Officer
First Community Resource Centre, Hanover Park

I'm with the CeaseFire Cure Violence Programme. It forms part of the First Community Resource Centre which is its mother body. We also have an Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) programme alongside it, as part of a new method we have developed over six years on how to transform communities (see First Community Resource Centre).

I'm first going to go with our CeaseFire project, talking to our methodology we've been using over the years. I've got some of my colleagues here who said in 2010 said this is not possible. But I'm still here, doing this thing of working in high-risk

communities and nobody has ever sworn at me, shot a bullet at me or came to my facility to harm me. So, can you believe that?

I don't use the word game. So, just go with me. I use the word "high-risk individual." So, I destigmatised them. Instead of calling them "gang members" I call them "high-risk individuals". Also, I don't call the person "a shooter". We call him "a transporter of violence". So, when I speak of a transporter of violence you know I speak of a shooter. *Daai ou wat so gun skiet*. It's a "high-risk individual" and it's "a high-risk group". So, we destigmatised the language.

It's like the strategy in Public Health, like epidemiology track and tracing. If you want to stop an epidemic, you must find the transporter. During Covid they put us all in quarantine; we can't put everyone in quarantine. We just go for the transporter of violence, and we quarantine that individual. It makes work much lighter, rather than trying to work with 3 000 gang members, just find the transporter.

I need to acknowledge our Civic Association chair, Dr. Gary Hartzenberg, our Senior Social Worker Jackie Horne, and one of our violence interrupters, Glen Hans, an ex-gang-member, who today is a community organiser with his own running club in the gang area where he used to be a gangster. Now, he's got 150 women running with him every morning and every evening. I don't know how he gets it right. I only have one woman that's running behind me, my wife, and he's got 150!

The CeaseFire programme

So, the programme is based on a very simple complex. It is based on *identifying and detecting* the violence. I'm not going to talk about the problems, today. I'm just going to talk about solutions and how we interrupt the violence, using strategic people, like Glenn Hans and outreach workers. They come out of gangs, they've been in prison, they understand the number system. So, I don't need to Sabela, they Sabela, using gangster slang. I don't do that, I don't Sabela, because you cannot do that when there are civilians in the room. That's inappropriate. It's wrong. So that's why I can't do it even if I sit in a gang conflict situation. I just speak English and Afrikaans.

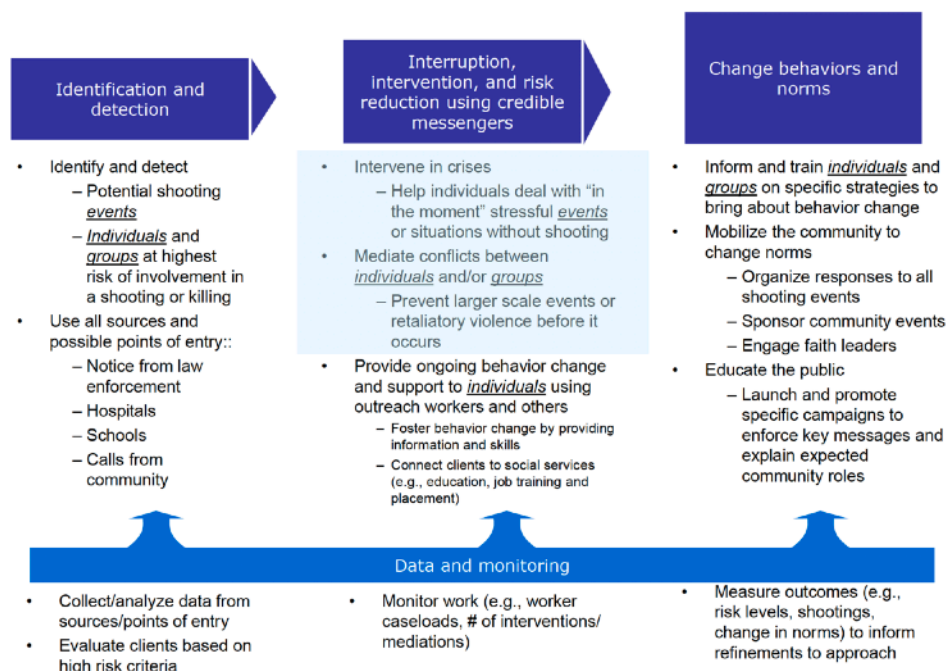
So, *identify* and *detect* the violence, *interrupt* the violence, and *alter* the behaviour of the *highest* possible transmitter. Who is the highest possible transmitter that can transmit this violence and then alter his behaviour? That will also include the community. The community also becomes transporters of violence. You've ever been on a scene where somebody got shot and killed, and you've just mediated the conflict. Everybody is fine, the gangsters are not going to retaliate, then an auntie comes down the road, saying, "*Wat gaan julle nou doen? Wat gaan julle nou doen?*" A community member! Then before you know – boom! – and gang violence goes out of control. So, the community also becomes transporters of violence.

The gunfire detection system

For those that don't know, I'm the implementer of the gunfire detection system. The City of Cape Town took the credit. I installed it. I'm the implementer and I had the main frame. It's a very powerful tool at the time when they had boots on the ground that could respond within 3 minutes to a scene of violence when there was gunfire. So, it was in real time.

We used it to identify and detect. Then we went out. The interrupters got a signal on their phone; I got it on my laptop. When an interrupter moves out, I can track and trace him. I can see where he's going, what's doing, with whom he's talking, and what's the level of violence that this guy can possibly transmit. Whatever the interrupter types on his phone I can see it on my laptop. I can then create a game plan to tell the rest of the interrupters what's happening on the ground, what's the reason for the violence and what we need to put in place.

The CeaseFire Model to Stop Shootings and Killings



The police arrive 30 minutes after we're done. I'm not pressing on them. They don't have that kind of technology.

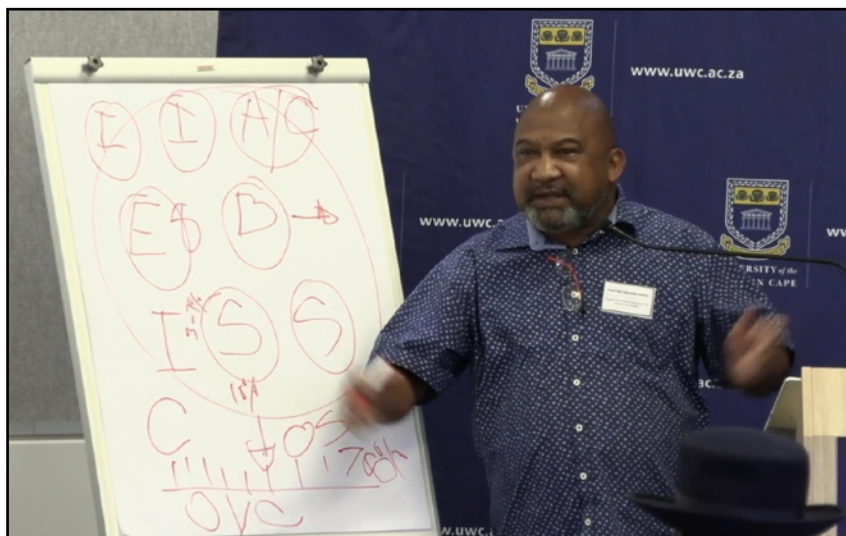
Reducing violence

Our main job is to reduce the violence. We have to support the community. We had one strategy but as we went along, we had to design additional strategies. The one strategy was called "Environmental contamination" and then "Behavioural contamination". Environmental contamination is where a guy doesn't choose the gang. The gang chooses him. The environment and the upbringing choose him. He had never chosen the gang. So, you come with a programme, "Our choices and consequences as a young man". He says, "When did I choose to be a gangster? It chose me: my upbringing, my parenting, fatherhood,

and lack of resources. It chose me with gang violence all over the show."

When a kid sees violence multiple times, his sensitivity shuts off. He doesn't feel what we feel. He feels in a different way. Violence becomes normalised. The anger sits in his brain, and he responds out of anger but he's not that kind of person because he has been environmentally contaminated. We've developed an eight-month programme to heal that individual. These guys are always waiting for somebody to come and help.

Then there's the "Behavioural contamination" challenge. These are the people who have chosen the gang life, they love it. "I like it. I like the money. I like the chain. I like the tackies." This is a difficult guy to help. He can be helped but it takes a little bit longer. These are



Past Craven Engel
Screen grab, Jaap Durand Chair video, UWC

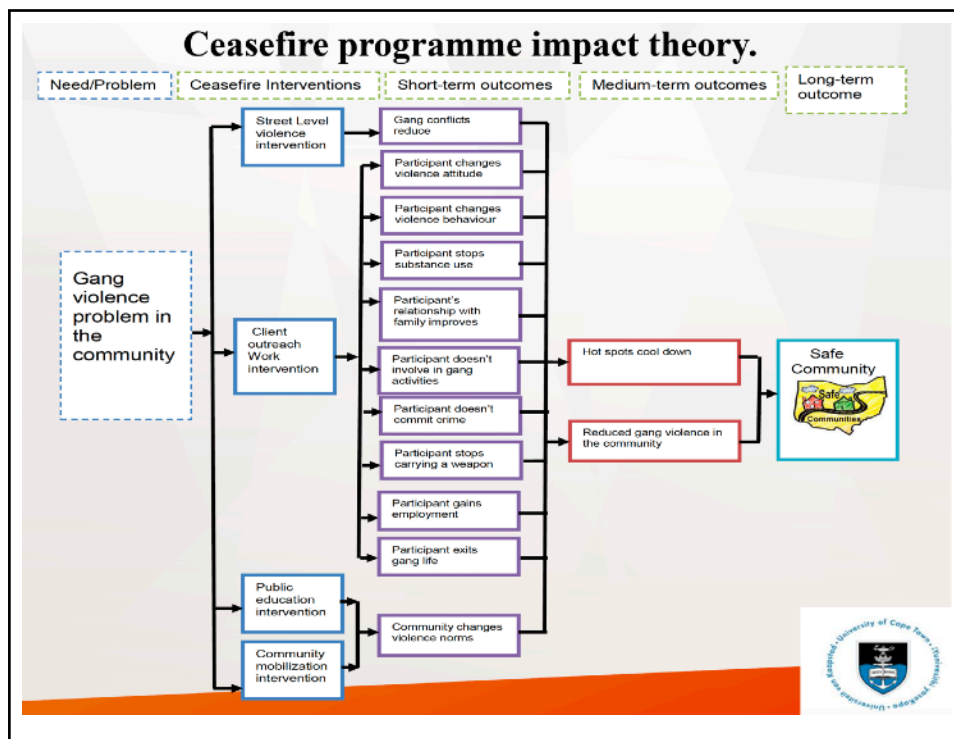
strategies we've been using over the years.

Another focus is on "institutional crime prevention", like the Bosasas, Bonny Town, the prisons. How do we de-institutionalise them, how do we alter their behaviour? This one got a 3% to 7% success rate. So, it doesn't really help.

Then we've got "situational crime prevention". I don't want to mention problems, you know them: colonisation, apartheid and urban displacement. However, this is a design frame so that these communities will self-destruct 30 years later. It's designed like that. So, for you and I, to think that we can prevent violence with situational crime prevention, is foolish. It's been built to self-destruct. The facts, you know – the way the malls are built, the way the streets are built, no electrical provision – it's built to self-destruct. We have a 10% chance in healing that and rebuilding our community.

The pillars of the project

So, social crime prevention is what we can really focus on, that is working with the behaviours of community and building resilience. There are a couple of pillars. We have a clear view of what we can do. We have a youth development centre that runs its own youth programme. They got a commitment with the Artscape; they're there every year. Seventy young people go there. We've got a feeding scheme. We feed 1 000 people every day. We've got a catchment area. We've got Career Guidance running at that facility or our Seniors programme. We've got an internet café. All those needs came out of our research. We realise this is what this community wants from us. We found out what we needed to do for them. The risk reduction came from them and not from us. Sometimes you want to come with something from Google or a desktop. They said "no".



The fragmentation of gangs

We've reached a cul-de-sac, when the gang system started splintering over the past seven, eight years. So, the gang system is not organized as huge street gangs anymore. They've been broken down, splintered. American gang is now almost 20 groups. The Laughing Boys is another eight groups. the Ghetto Kids is another six groups, and so on. They are headless and there's no central structure running their system any longer. It is difficult now. So, all the different heads of these splintered gangs are recruiting in the OVC sector. Where's the orphan and vulnerable children?

It's easy to go and arrest all the syndicate bosses. They say, "Cut the head off and then you get hold of the snake." I'm telling you, the tail makes more damage if you cut off the head. Leave the

head on and kill it from the tail. You kill the head, and more damage follows from the young guns. But things are going wrong on the ground because nobody runs the gang. So, it's a social group, a vulnerable group that needs a leader. Somebody, said to me, "Oh you want to make smart gang leaders." I make smart gang leaders if violence gets reduced because I'm educating this man. Why do you want to come and combat me? I'm educating him to reduce the violence and bring resources into the community.

The prevention of recruitment of youth gang members

Our OVC sector started six years ago. I told, our social worker, "Go out there and identify and detect what's happening? Who and how are they recruiting the young people?" We did a proper survey, with a proper baseline in

real time. Nobody can tell is, "We were at the home, you weren't at our home." I can see on my system; you're not at home.

So, we surveyed 10% of the 12 000 families in Hanover Park. It came out that 78% of the children was red flagged. Half of them – of that 78% – was placed by Child Welfare. These children were placed in the wrong environment, wrong housing, wrong situation, wrong families, wrong temporary safety, wrong foster. How did it happen?

So, we took those 169 children, and we processed them and see whether we could get them placed into a safer environment. Very quickly within the two years we've done it. We're currently doing the reassessment of these children to see what the need of family care is. Now we've built around them the same system of prevention, that is the prevention of family breakdown. When you detect there's a breakdown in the new family, try and prevent it, because if you're going to get it, this guy who is already a gang member is going to be very declarative. This is preventative and this can be managed by programmatic stuff.

We also took on the prevention of the institutionalisation of young people. When you institutionalise kids, you move them to a little university for gangsters. Eighty per cent of the people I'm

working with had been to that little university for high-risk individuals. There's no control there. We built an ecosystem around these families to see what it is we need to do.

For me, the prevention of recruitment of youth gang members is the aim of this policy framework.

Let me conclude with something I said in an interview, "Nobody's going to come from anywhere to help to save us, not from overseas, not from our local government; nobody's going to come with a magic wand to cure the Cape Flats. As individuals we need to be so determined to build up resilience, create hope for our people and to grow because politics has clearly failed us" (Kagicha, 2025).

Amen, thank you.

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6

Safety in the Western Cape's Provincial Strategic Plan

Hilton R. Arendse

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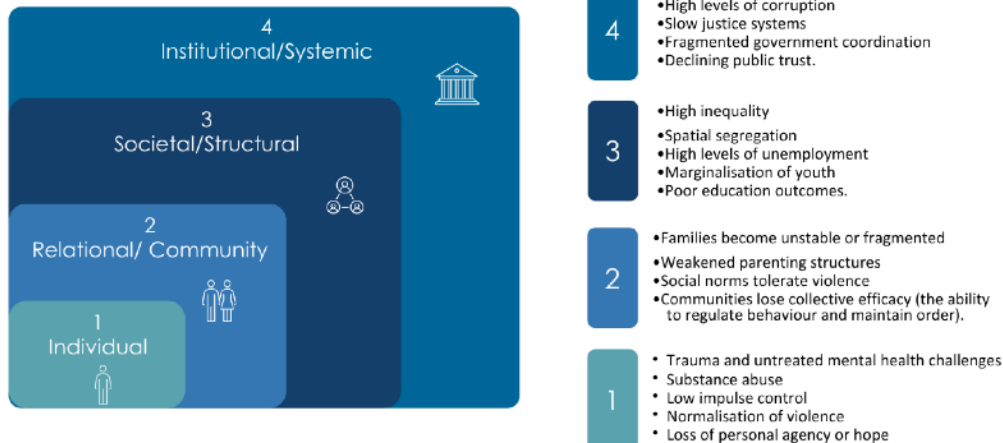
I'm the Acting Head of the Department for Oversight and Community Safety and it is not my natural environment. I am normally the Chief Information Officer in the Office of the Premier, working in the IT environment. A new Head of Department has been appointed and he will start shortly. So, so we in the Department are in a handover period.

In this presentation I apply my experience from the IT environment and understanding of the overall Provincial Strategic Plan. I do have two colleagues present here today with in-depth knowledge of the Department of Oversight and Community Safety.

Yesterday, in the Provincial Standing Committee, we presented our Department's budget. One of the members asked, "Do you think crime is a crisis in the Province?" I then referred to this event, saying that it's not only about crime as such, it is also about social dysfunction. He agreed and understood that it's not just about crime it's about the whole matter of social dysfunction.

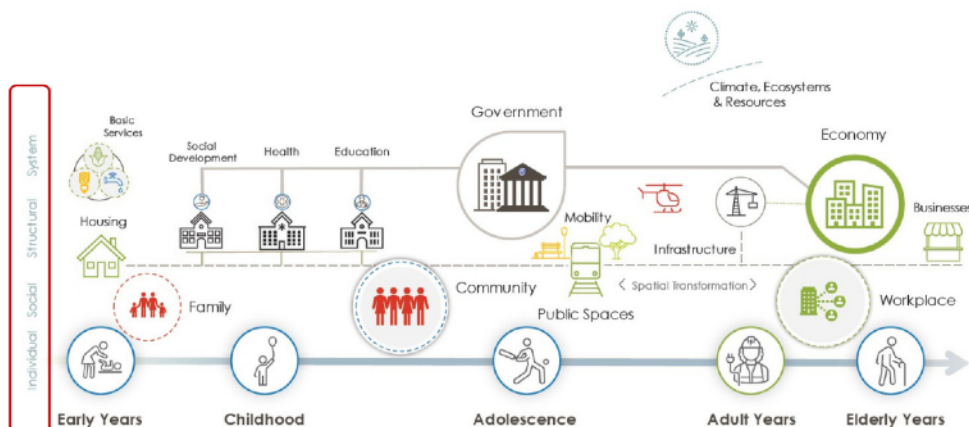
I was asked to talk from Department's perspective; what are we doing? I'll start off with the Provincial Strategic Plan, as it relates to safety. Safety is one of the Province's four priorities. Our outcome statement is that the Western Cape is a

Dimensions of Social Dysfunction



Slide 1: Dimensions of Social Dysfunction

Provincial Strategic Plan: Life Course and Systems Approach



Slide 2: Life Course and Systems Approach

resilient and safe society, that is what we are working towards.

When we look at the dimensions of social dysfunction. I'll just

mention these levels without going into detail. There are experts here and some speakers have spoken passionately about it. These are the four dimensions in terms of social advising that we use for our

provincial safety plan (see Slide 1). At the individual level we first look at trauma related to mental health challenges, substance abuse, low impulse control, normalisation of violence and loss of personal agency.

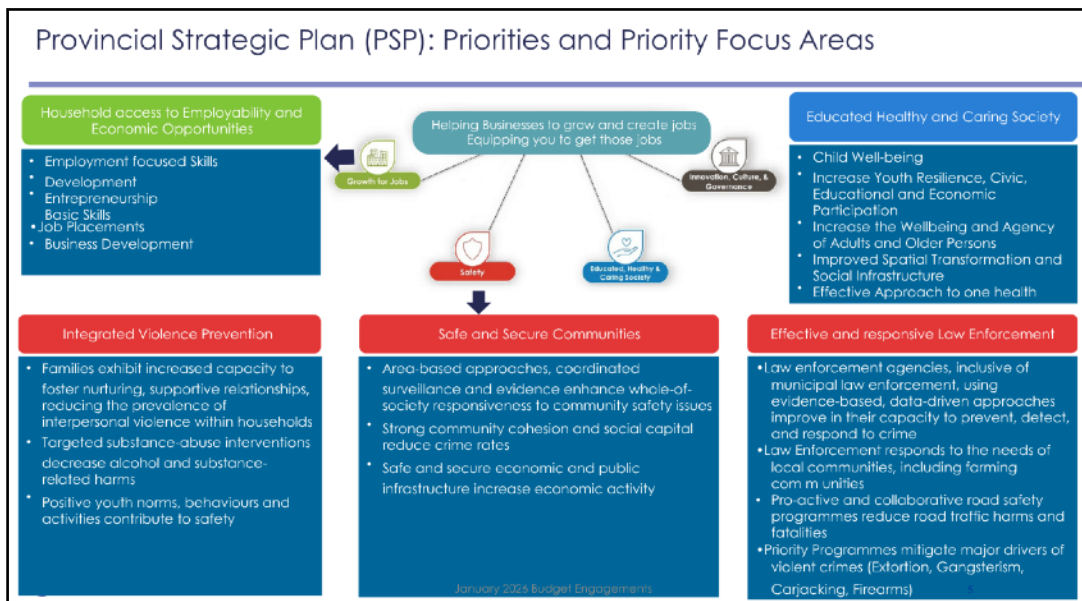
At the relational and community level we focus on the families and their relationships, like the weakening of parental structures, the tolerance for violence and the loosening of social norms. At the societal level we're looking at spatial segregation, the high levels of unemployment, the marginalisation of youth and poor education. At the systemic level and institutional level we experience law enforcement challenges, high levels of corruption and an ineffective social justice system.

How do we then link to these dimensions with the Provincial Strategic Plan?

On my second slide, these dimensions of social dysfunction are indicated vertically (on the left) at the systems

approach. Horizontally the course of life is represented. This how we structure the Provincial Strategic Plan. This plan has four priorities. The first one is growth for jobs; the second one speaks to safety; the third speaks to an educated, healthy and caring society; and the fourth speaks to innovation, culture and governance. Although these are listed as four separate priorities they overlap.

In Slide 3, we look at safety, the first priority focus here is on “Integrated Violence Prevention”. We focus on families and youth, substance abuse and on making a positive improvement. This is not only a focus of the Department of Oversight and Community Safety, the police. We have various Departments that focus on Education, Social Development, Health and Wellness, the Department of Mobility, the Department of Culture, Religion and Sport. They all contribute to this specific priority focus area.



Slide 3: Priorities and Priorities and Priority Focus Areas



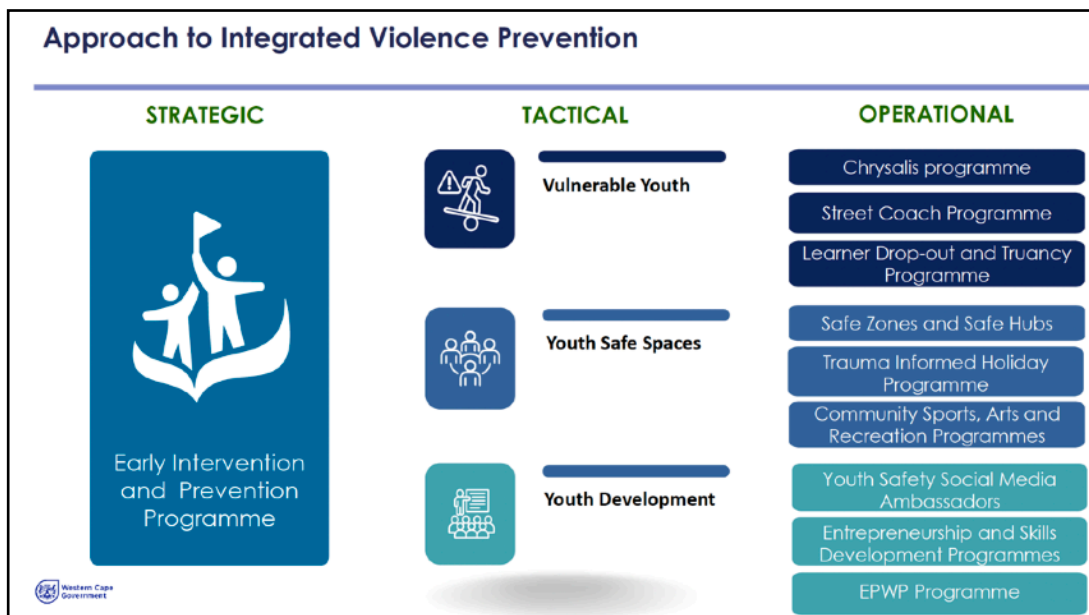
Mr Hilton R. Arendse
Screen grab, Jaap Durand Chair video, UWC

The second priority focus area is that of “Safe and Secure Communities”. How do we strengthen community structures, and also focus on building infrastructure within these communities? Once again this is not a Department of Police Oversight and Community Safety focus area, it's the concern of the whole of government. The City of Cape Town contributes to this specific outcome.

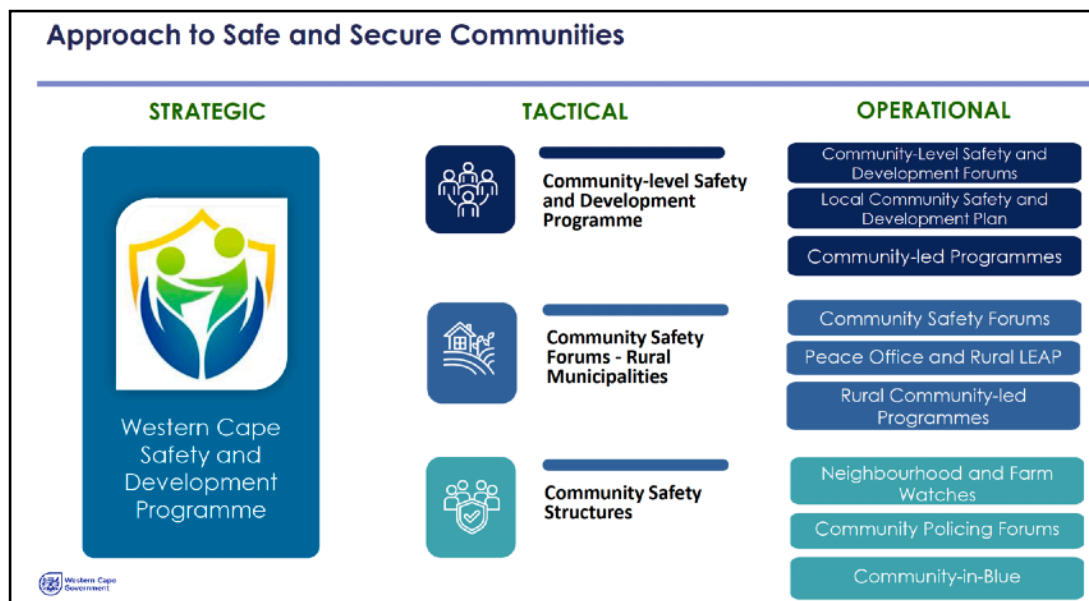
Lastly, with the Safety priority focus area is for “Effective and Responsive Law Enforcement” where we work with our partners in the city and the South African Police Services. In the City of Cape Town we want to work towards more effective and responsive enforcement, making sure that we respond to community needs. There are quite a few initiatives that we embark on, making sure that we are evidence-driven, evidence-based and data-driven, making sure that we are addressing the needs of

the community while being also proactive and collaborative. There's a lot of work that happening in that specific space, specifically with reference to the SAPS and City of Cape Town Collaboration Agreement.

One thing we have added though and that we cannot ignore, is the that we need to focus on jobs and opportunities. We need to get alternatives to gang membership. We need to create the mainstream and gangster membership should be an extreme alternative to mainstream opportunities that we provide to our youth. So, we are focusing on employment skills and this comes from our growth-for-jobs priority. We have the priority focus: access to employability and economic opportunities. We have as a fifth focus area “Educated Health and Caring Society” where we're focusing on child well-being, increasing youth resilience.



Slide 4: Approach to Integrated Violence Prevention



Slide 5: Approach to Safe and Secure Communities

We are also focusing on the approach to health and this is generally managed by the Department of Education, Health,

Social Development and the Department of Agriculture and Infrastructure.

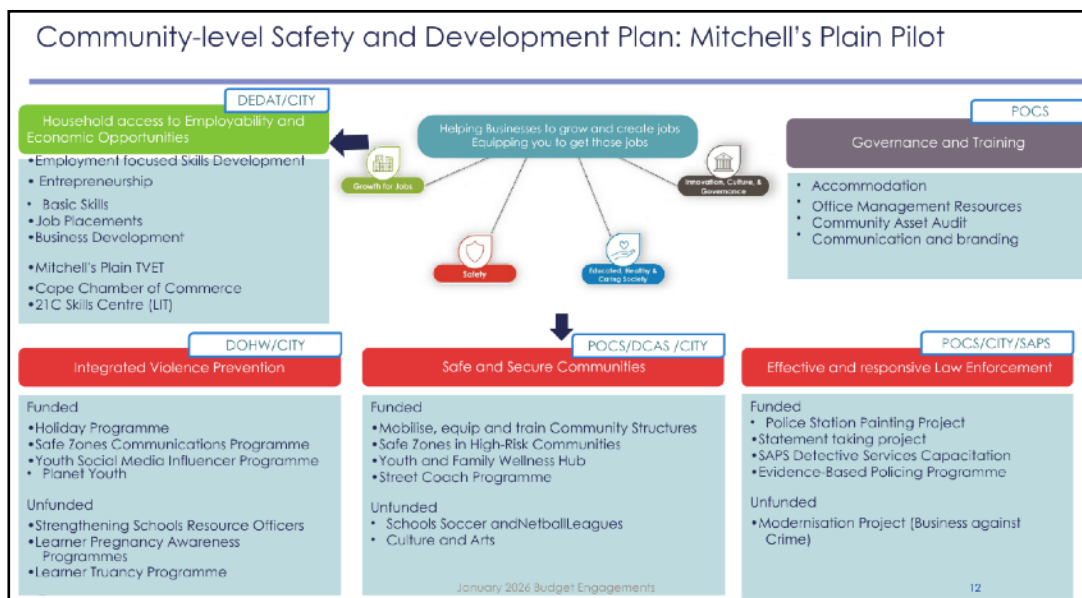
Next, I'm drilling down to the Department of Police Oversight and Community Safety. Our strategic approach to "Integrated Violence Prevention" entails our "Early Intervention and Prevention Programme" (Slide 4). At a tactical level we focus on vulnerable youth, safe spaces, and youth development. Operationally, we focus among others on Chrysalis, i.e. a business programme, and the "Street Coach Programme" which is a new initiative. We've also introduced the "Learner Dropout and Truancy programme". (Some participants have previously spoken passionately about the dropout problem. We need to see how we can link up with one another.)

The "Youth Safe Spaces" is a programme at community level where we're looking at safe zones during holidays, offering a variety of programmes, such as community sports and arts, and culture programmes. In most instances these are aimed at

youngsters not only during the holiday period but also during the school term, so that we can make sure that our youngsters are occupied and that they can focus on the positive aspects of their development.

The programme focuses on developing youth safety social media ambassadors. We need to get our youth to start becoming ambassadors. (I do not see a lot of youth in this room and we need to get the youth more involved). This programme is aimed at getting youth leaders to participate in getting their peers to become more positive. So we're focusing on youth self-safety social media. There's also our "Skills Development Programme" and the EPWP (the Expanded Public Works Programme). So these are some of the initiatives that we are looking at.

How do we get programmes in place so that our youth can sustain themselves economically and not become



Slide 6: Mitchell's Plain Pilot

Role of the Community Safety and Development Programme



Provide strategic direction and oversight of safety and development interventions in communities



Monitor, evaluate, and report on the effectiveness of interventions against agreed indicators.



Strengthen collaboration between government departments, SAPS, the City of Cape Town, District/ Local Municipalities, civil society organisations and business



Build community trust through transparency, accountability, and active citizen participation.



Facilitate and coordinate integrated planning, resource pooling, and joint implementation of interventions.



Foster socio-economic opportunities for youth and at-risk groups to address root causes of violence and crime



Slide 7: From Problem Identification to Impact

the runners for gangsters, or become gang members in order to earn money?

That is a concern we need to address and why the number of little dropouts is such a key matter that we need to focus on. These dropouts are the most vulnerable. We have developed an approach to our “Safe and Secure Communities Programme” (see Slide 5).

You cannot have safety without development and you cannot have development without safety. You need economic development as part of it too.

At a tactical level we're looking at a community level safety and development programme. Operationally, in some communities we already have community development forums. We have started a pilot project with community safety forums in Mitchells Plain (see Slide 6).

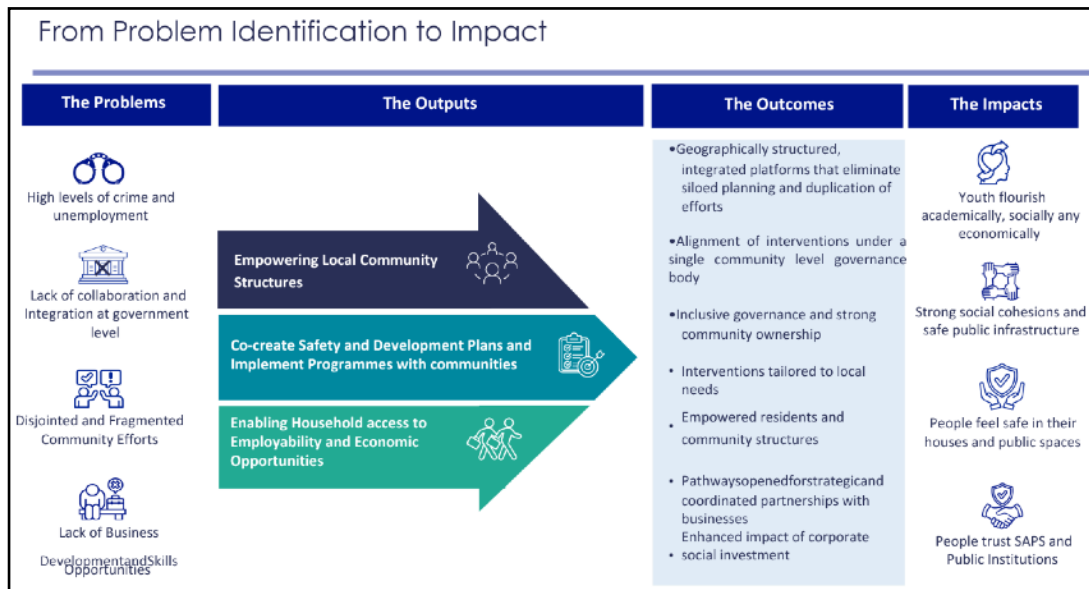
At an operational level we're looking at community level Safety Development

Forums, as a recognised forum. It's funded to operate, so that they can run programmes because there are many structures within communities. The struggle they have is to sustain programmes that will make a difference in the community. How do we, as government, fund some of these programmes? If a programme is implemented by one forum and we see that it's really impactful, we need to make it part of a main government programme. The relevant department then needs to get involved, co-creating a local community development plan.

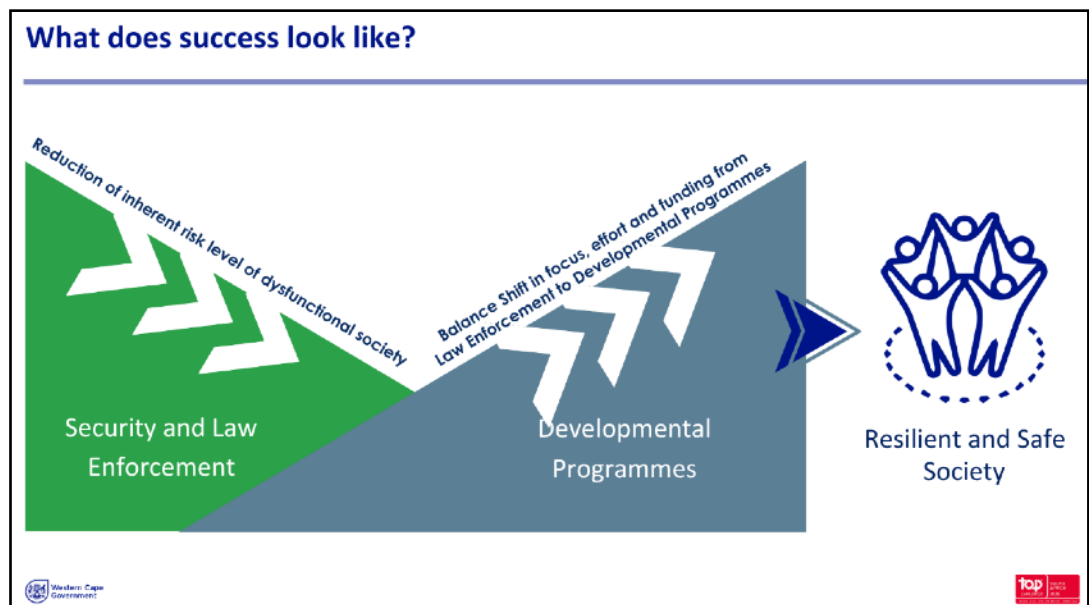
We started and established such community safety forums in the rural communities. So, co-creating with a local committee, not government telling them what they need, or what they should do. We also have police officers in deep rural communities deep and community safety structures, our neighbourhood watches, farm watches, Community Police Forums

and CEOs and business working with it.
 (Since I have been here I've already heard some inspirational inputs, mostly from people whom I have not met and I've been acting for the past two years.

These are people we need to be involved in the implementation of these programmes. We need to discuss and see how can we strengthen the work that they're doing.)



Slide 8: Role of the Community Safety and Development Programme



Slide 9: What does success look like?

With reference to Slide 7, we look at the strategic level to our “Safer City and Safer District Collaboration Programme”. It's the second year of the programme, and it is really working. I'm not going to run through it in detail, because I'm cognisant of my time that's running out.

So, how do we implement the Provincial Strategic Plan at community level? How do we move from strategy and visioning to implementation at the local community level? We need to participate in our safety development programme where we intend making our province safe, resilient and safe.

I'm not elaborating on all of these problems at this time (see further Slide 8). The specific problems we're experiencing are the high levels of crime and unemployment, the lack of collaboration and integration of government level. Different government departments are working in the same community, but they're not working together with one another. So the impact is not felt and they use different means to determine where they're going to spend their time, effort and funding. It is not the most effective and efficient use of our resources. Other problems are the disjointed and fragmented community efforts. We got so many community structures, everybody wants to do something and then they compete against one another. You know these kinds of problems, around personal arguments, leadership and image, and the development of narrow objectives. That's a different level of social dysfunction.

In terms of the outputs, we want to empower local communities, co-create safety development plans and also

enabling household access to employability. Our outcome is about having one structure within the community that government can work through and where all the services, all the initiatives within that community are coordinated. The impact will be that our youth will flourish within stronger cohesive community structures.

Regarding community structures: They need to provide strategic direction, strengthen collaboration, facilitate and coordinate integrated planning for the community. They also need to monitor, and build community.

There is much talk of the army in our townships. Bringing in the army will not reduce the risk we're talking about because it's another form of control we're putting on top of the community. When the army moves on that the inherent risk will remain. We need to have programmes in place over the long term. The things we're trying to achieve, cannot be addressed overnight. Crime has been an ongoing problem, much longer than the past 30 years. It will take us to change the value systems in our community. We need to change the behaviour within. We further need to reduce our dependence on security and law enforcement which is not inclusive to what we see. But if we really develop the programmes set out above, it will mean less reliance on law enforcement and more focus on social development. So, as a community we shift the balance of the focus and effort in funding from law enforcement to the development programme.

To be successful, we need to invest in enforcement but we have funding that we can put in development programmes (see Slide 9). Just saying that we need more

law enforcement does not solve the problem. It might be that we need to increase law enforcement in the interim to arrest the current status and reduce the high levels of crime but we need to have programmes in place that will have a long-term impact, so that we can

actually achieve development. So that our people can feel safe at night when they walk without having to worry.

So, ultimately if we want to move to a resilient and safe society it will take time and effort. It will require collaboration and development from us.

SECTION C

Naming the crisis

This summary of the presentations of Dr Anell Stacey Daries, Maj. Gen. (Ret) Jeremy Vearey and Prof Irvin Kinnes examines two central questions: the historical roots of gangsterism in the Western Cape and the limits of “law and order” responses. Taken together, these perspectives demonstrate that gangsterism is not an episodic criminal problem but a deeply embedded socio-historical phenomenon shaped by colonial legacies, apartheid spatial planning, prison subcultures, and contemporary governance failures.

The historical roots of gangsterism

Gangsterism in the Western Cape has layered historical origins that stretch back over a century. One of the earliest identifiable roots lies in prison gang formations, particularly the “Numbers gangs” (28s and its derivatives the 26s, 27s), whose origins are linked to figures such as Nongoloza Mathebula.

These prison-based organisations developed complex hierarchies, rituals, and codes of conduct, which later permeated street gangs. As Vearey emphasises, this subculture operates as a durable ideological system – almost cult-like – governing authority, belonging, and economic organisation within gangs.

A second major root lies in the social dislocations caused by apartheid, especially forced removals under the Group Areas Act. Scholars such as Don Pinnock and Steffen Jensen show how communities such as District Six were dismantled and relocated to the Cape Flats. Kinnes argues that gang identities and affiliations were not erased but transplanted into these new, fragmented environments. The resulting spatial dislocation produced mistrust, weakened social cohesion, and intensified competition over scarce resources.

This structural disruption was compounded by unemployment, poverty, and political marginalisation. Daries highlights how apartheid-era racial

classification and the stigmatisation of *skollies* effectively criminalised poverty and young, marginalised men. The breakdown of traditional social controls – family networks, community norms, and local accountability – created conditions in which gangs could emerge as alternative structures of protection, identity, and economic survival.

By the late 20th century, gangsterism evolved further through the expansion of drug markets and access to firearms, particularly in the 1980s. What began as loosely organised street groups became increasingly sophisticated criminal enterprises. Post-1994 transitions accelerated this transformation. While democracy expanded constitutional freedoms under the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, it also reduced certain forms of authoritarian social control, enabling gangs to reorganise, decentralise, and expand into corporate-like entities with diversified criminal portfolios.

Importantly, all three authors stress that gangsterism is sustained inter-generationally. Young people, often victims of structural violence, are drawn into gangs for protection, belonging, and economic opportunity. Thus, gangsterism is rooted not only in history but in the ongoing reproduction of inequality, marginalisation, and spatial exclusion.

The limitations of state responses

The second major finding concerns the limitations of state responses that rely primarily on policing, militarisation, and punitive legislation. Across all three accounts, “law and order” approaches are shown to produce,

at best, temporary and localised successes.

Kinnes details repeated state interventions – specialised police units, legislative frameworks such as the Prevention of Organised Crime Act, and even military deployments. While these interventions sometimes disrupt gang activity, they are undermined by poor coordination, internal police conflict, corruption, and lack of sustained strategic planning. The deployment of the military, for instance, provides only short-term suppression of violence; once withdrawn, gangs quickly reassert control.

Vearey offers a critical insider perspective, arguing that policing strategies have often misdiagnosed the nature of the problem. Borrowing models such as the U.S. RICO framework without fully understanding local gang dynamics has limited effectiveness. Law enforcement tends to focus on visible crimes (“counting bodies”) rather than analysing the underlying structures of organised crime, such as financial flows, networks, and ideological cohesion. Moreover, the absence of clear legal definitions of organised crime and insufficient qualitative intelligence hampers effective prosecution.

A deeper limitation lies in the inability of policing to address gang culture as a social system. Vearey stresses that gangs are sustained by a powerful subcultural logic that cannot be dismantled through enforcement alone. Addressing this requires interventions in education, community institutions, and value systems, domains beyond traditional policing.

Daries further critiques contemporary security responses as reproducing historical patterns of exclusion. Initiatives such as the N2 “security wall” reflect a spatial logic of containment rather than transformation. By isolating “problem areas,” the state effectively externalises violence, reinforcing stigma and justifying ongoing neglect. This mirrors colonial and apartheid practices of segregation, suggesting that current responses are less a break from the past than a continuation of it.

All three presenters emphasise that law-and-order approaches fail because they treat gangsterism as an isolated criminal issue rather than a systemic social problem. Heavy investment in policing contrasts sharply with underinvestment in youth development, education, and community infrastructure. The absence of meaningful economic opportunities and social support continues to push young people toward gangs.

The persistence of gangsterism in the Western Cape reflects the convergence of historical, structural, and cultural forces. Its roots lie in prison subcultures, apartheid spatial engineering, and enduring socio-economic marginalisation. “Law and order” responses, while necessary, are fundamentally limited when deployed in isolation. They fail to address the underlying conditions that sustain gangs and often reproduce the very inequalities that give rise to them.

A more effective response requires a shift from reactive enforcement to proactive social investment: strengthening community institutions, expanding youth opportunities, fostering civic power, and addressing spatial and economic injustice. Without such a holistic approach, state interventions will remain cyclical and temporary, while gangsterism continues to adapt, endure, govern and inflict fear in the margins of society.

7

Segregating violence: Tracing the ties between spatial injustice and gangsterism in Cape Town

Anell Stacey Daries

Lecturer

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Stellenbosch University

At the start of 2026, it was announced that the City of Cape Town approved an adjustment budget to allocate R115m for At the start of 2026, it was announced that the City of Cape Town approved an adjustment budget to allocate R115m for the building of a security wall along the stretch of road referred to in news reports as the N2 "hell run" (Payne, 2026). Alongside plans for pedestrian crossings, upgraded lighting, landscaping, and access control, these initiatives form part of projected improvements to increase safety and security in the area (Payne, 2026). The

decision to allocate funds for these improvements followed a series of violent incidents on the N2 highway, which raised concerns about the safety of residents and commuters (Swart, 2026; Smit, 2026; Mpisi, 2026 and Herron 2026).

Manifested in swift reactions, the wall divided the public (Swart 2026; Smit 2026; Mpisi, 2026 and Herron, 2026). In interviews recorded by the City of Cape Town, residents flanking the N2 highway praised the initiative (Hill-Lewis, 2026). Pundits also lauded the city for ensuring that the Western Cape

continues to work. Simultaneously, respondents across media platforms highlighted the ways in which this initiative echoes the country's history (Sokoyi, 2026; Petersen, 2026; Wanneburg, 2026). Beyond its Trumpian flair, this initiative reveals an older impulse that can be traced all the way back to Van Riebeeck's hedge (Mmusinyane, 2023; Myers, 2009). This push towards progress reeks of old segregationist and apartheid rhetoric, which came to a head at the point of the country's unification in 1910. The stench of *swart gevaar* was in the air (Posel, 2001). It is undeniable that there is a problem on the N2. But this impulse to divide exposes the city's inclinations in a spectacular way.

This impulse reveals how the City and the Cape remain subjected to histories of conquest, plunder, division, neglect, and violence.

It is against this backdrop that I set my inquiry into understanding the mechanism by which gangsterism continues to thrive. I wish to understand this social problem along the lines by which spatial planning was conjured, manifested, and is maintained in the present day. Returning to the spectre of segregationist and apartheid spatial planning, we are forced to admit that it is along these lines that lives and livelihoods were shaped. It is at this nexus that we reckon with the ways in which the Western Cape outsources and isolates problems to hotspots – calling them 'war zones', removing them from Google Maps, and placing road signs that warn us of danger.

These markings imply that we have entered into the wrong place willingly – that we are partly responsible for the historical and present-day limitations and failures of the city. That you know who lives there. It is along these lines that we ought to attempt to understand gangsterism and its continuities in the Western Cape.

Considering intergenerational effects, economic realities, ongoing marginalisation, and systemic inequalities, existing and emerging literature on gangsterism and gang violence in the Western Cape calls for a nuanced dissection of the history and rise of gangsterism (Pillay, 2014). Along with this contextual reading, the existing literature calls for the consideration of both perpetrators' and victims' realities (Van Wyk and Theron, 2005; Steinberg, 2004; Kynoch, 1999). Ongoing research highlights the importance of examining the initial point of violation more closely.

Reflecting the deeply gendered nature of gangsterism, existing studies raise questions about the initial point of entry (Vetten, 2000; Ward 2007; Dziewanski, 2020; Vilttoft, 2022). Specifically, how young people, particularly boys and young men who end up in gangs, are often victims first. Beyond overly sympathetic reasoning, this line of questioning demonstrates that without a comprehensive understanding of the circumstances that gave rise to gang culture, society cannot truly begin to make sense of the relentless cycle of violence and victimisation perpetuated by gang activity. This approach highlights that treating gangsterism as an isolated problem alone sets us up for failure (Bowers-Du Toit, 2014; Pillay, 2014: 25–27).



Dr Anell Stacey Daries
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Gangsterism, as a societal issue and phenomenon, evokes a particular mental image. Certain demographic markers are portrayed as most prominent (Jensen, 2006). Moreover, across media platforms, reporting on gangsterism conjures up images of particular bodies in specific places at specific times.

Considering this as a mechanism of social casting, I focus my intervention on how gangsterism in the Western Cape is imagined as a problem of and on the Cape Flats (Bowers-Du Toit, 2014: 1–7; Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo, 2021: 118–132).

The area known today as the Cape Flats remained largely uninhabited until the 1950s, when government policies mandated the forced removal and resettlement of non-white populations from urban areas in and around the city centre. The passing of the Group Areas Act and the Population Registration Act

in the mid-20th century not only categorised race but also racially segregated spaces. Subsequently, plans were established to enforce racial segregation (Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo, 2021: 118–132; Pillay, 2014: 25–30).

The existence of gangs, understood today as organised groups that commonly engage in criminal activity and often exert territorial control, dates back to the pre-apartheid period (Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo, 2021: 118–132; Pillay, 2014: 25–30). Across time, these gangs share continuities but differ from the iterations seen today. Many embodied the image of the *skollie*. The feared figure looming in dark alleyways and loafing on street corners. Literature and media have since romanticised this archetype, but the reality of the *skollie* was that this figure was a product of often dire social and economic conditions

of the time (Davids, 2017; Nauright, 1997).

Along with this romanticised imagery, there is a sense of nostalgia for the *skollie* of old. Reading pre-forced removal histories of places such as District Six, one finds an implied belief in the existence and adherence to a social code (Trotter, 2009: 49). These social controls, like community ties and values, were believed to keep such figures in check. As forced removals disrupted long-established social structures, the decorum and social networks essential for the gang to function were eroded (Pillay, 2014: 25–27).

Life was, and still is, tough on the Cape Flats. With the establishment of the Cape Flats area, gangsterism continued and took a different form. In this new world, entire communities were far removed from the lives they once knew and all they were familiar with and held dear. Unemployment rates soared, and there were few options by way of recreation. The breakdown of social networks and political marginalisation created ideal conditions for youth criminality, in some instances taking the form of street gangs, consisting of children and young people banding together out of a need for mutual protection on the streets – staking claims to territory (Pillay, 2014: 25–27).

While the Group Areas Act was passed in the 1950s, its enforcement was slow, at times uneven, and undeniably destructive for displaced communities. Removals peaked between the 1960s and 1980s. During this period, gang-related crime became an increasingly urgent problem. From the 1960s onwards, gang fights grew more common, and drug use

and sale became more widespread, exacerbated by the increased access to firearms and the rise of organised drug trade in the 1980s.

The state's structural neglect created a power vacuum, enabling gangs to expand their influence and control in these areas. Personal stories and literature reveal how gangs provide a sense of protection, kinship and belonging to marginalised youth from displaced and often disenfranchised families.

The allure of belonging to a gang, coupled with limited opportunities and support from traditional institutions, sustained the cycle of violence and criminal activity in these communities (Pillay, 2014: 25–27). Today, the gang violence we see on the news is nothing new for particular communities. As narrated in the discourse surrounding the N2 security wall, it is the threat of the potential spillover of the everyday violence experienced in gang-ridden communities that receives the most attention. Certain parts of the Cape have become synonymous with gang violence, where residents live in constant fear and are often coerced into negotiating their safety by seeking protection from gangs. Considering the intergenerational cycle of trauma, these communities have lived in the reality of this form of gang violence since the late 20th century (Pillay, 2014: 25–27).

At various stages, certain areas have been among the most dangerous places in the world. Returning to the mechanism of casting, the insidious nature of identifying a place and its people as potentially dangerous and threatening fixes these communities in their current situations. When places and people are identified as no-go zones of violence, it

allows justification for state neglect. It allows for the imagery of Black and brown bodies sprawled in the streets of Cape's hinterlands to be obscured in plain sight. It permits the building of a security wall to protect some and, once again, to push others to the margins of the city.

In my appeal today, I aimed to engage with the discourse that identifies gangsterism and gang violence as a crisis, echoing across time and extending across space. Today, we observe how, in the worst of times, the army has been deployed to patrol areas that police are not equipped to engage. In a country with a tenuous history of policing and law enforcement, how does this interaction between community and police influence the lived reality of gang-afflicted neighbourhoods?

For as long as gangs are viewed as an isolated crisis in an otherwise functioning society, the cycle of violence will persist. It is vital to address the systemic issues that contribute to the proliferation of gangs and gang violence in these communities, rather than simply resorting to short-sighted measures. By understanding the root causes and possibly implementing comprehensive solutions, we can work towards breaking the cycle of violence and building safer, more sustainable communities for all.

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8

Lessons on gang crime from an ex-police officer

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I'm going to speak to you from the lessons I've learned as a police officer and how the police are looked at gang crime. It's also a perspective from the street which has been my experience both growing up and also as station commander, intelligence officer and detective in every other discipline in the police.

Firstly, in terms of naming the crisis. My understanding I've developed in my years with gangs. It doesn't matter whether you're talking pre-1994 or post-1994, we're dealing with a crisis of criminal violence. In order to navigate freely and walk through Elsies River one needs to navigate the presence of gangs,

as they are a literal risk to you. It affects your freedom, if you decide that I must not go to the Moravian Church in Clark Estate because I live in another part of the township that is associated with the 28s and the 26ers are dominant there. So I'm rather going to the church opposite Elsies High School, that affects your freedom of association. If I do not develop friendships beyond my immediate confines, then it affects my freedom of association. If Pikkie Bai where I lived cannot not conduct free economic activity without extortion, that affects his freedom of economic activity. In other words we're talking our fundamental freedoms which the gangs challenge. It affects our freedoms, from



Maj.Gen. (Ret.) Jeremy Vearey
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the state side we have challenges in contesting that criminal governance.

The only solution in my opinion lies in building civic power to counter such criminal governments. The police as an institution and security institution is out there in defence of that civic power, as a prelude to restore normal governance in those areas.

How do I see the crisis? I want to address myself to some of the issues that I was part of in policing and the intelligence community, and what the challenges now? The first thing we need to understand, is that the gangs we're dealing with – the 28s, 26s – they are 200 years old. The Hard Livings (HLs) was formed sometime in the early 80s. Elsie's River's structured gangs go back to the 1970s and the 60s. So we're dealing with a phenomenon on which the police tested various solutions, and which in the previous era was not policed at all. Policing gangs is a work in progress.

What has been our challenges post-1994? The first challenge is an area for scholarship.

Idealistically, I was part of the team involved in drawing up the provisions of the Prevention of Organised Crime Act, which became an act in 1998. It sought to address gang activity, gang criminality as a particular area in law. In other words, it set a norm for us. It also sought to address organised crime within a certain legislative framework. It set a norm there. None of this was previously done in South African history.

Our solutions we had to find elsewhere, for example for its racketeering provisions we travelled to the United States, New York state, where we looked at the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (Rico Act) and made that lock, stock and barrel part of our act. We fitted it into the way we saw things. We were police officers not legislators.

Some of us were then sent to Los

Angeles, and met up with their Street Terrorism Enforcement Program, the STEP Act as it is practiced in South Central LA. It is a very militarised notion and approach of dealing with gangs as a particular threat. It became Chapter 4 of our Prevention of Organised Crime Act (POCA).

Now, what has happened since then? This is from a detective. Gangs have involved. In fact, that analysis did not anticipate that gangs were actually criminal enterprises. These things we saw on the street of drug trafficking and dealing in stolen goods were all part of one system. Organised as organised business activity of the day, drug sales, whatever were all part of one organisation. This is what has kept gangs alive for hundreds of years.

What we underestimated at the time, but some of us have learned is that there's a very powerful ideological culture that governs gangs in this Province. It's a 200 year old gang culture that's the Numbers gang culture. In other words, forget about what you see on the street. It is a subculture.

It is like a cult that determines hierarchical relationships, authority, even sophisticated ways of organising criminal business activity that goes back a long time. It reached our Cape Town area at the time when the Transvaal Commission of Prisons in the 1920s decided to break up a group called uMkhosi Wezi-ntaba which is a forerunner to the Numbers gangs in Cinderella Prison on the East Rand.

This group was rounded up together with another sect called the Ninevites of which the leaders were people like Grant Shezi, Jan Norton and Nongoloza and they tried to break them up. They

transferred the membership and kept the leadership in the Quarry Prison in Parow, Robben Island and Tokai Prison. The Numbers culture as we understand today, the philosophy behind it, the ideology got infused.

Now, how do you deal with that? To me it is a challenge, because you can deal with practical law enforcement but dealing with a subculture requires a different type of solution. This subculture has so deeply been rooted in gang culture, the role of education, the role of churches, the role of a different moral framework or other kind of values or other interpretation of the same values which they teach. It is a challenge that can only be addressed in civil society and by institutions other than enforcement. So that is one particular issue of scholarship.

Coming to our operational approach. What you hear from the Madlanga Commission or what you hear in Parliament's *Ad hoc* Committee, are deep levels of the infiltration of gang culture and organised crime. I want to say "gang culture" because let me tell you about who "Cat" [Matlala] really is. There are different names, different factions but the same game. The names we are seeing are different and we've always understood it, but it was never tackled. We're seeing gang infiltration and organised crime involvement at the highest levels of the police in a very sophisticated way.

We've seen ourselves subjected to the kind of processes whereby the very investigators who are investigating them are accused by the very criminals of being corrupt which is a standard thing in any investigation, even in this Province. So, how do we deal with that challenge? The corruption of the

intelligence environment ought to tell us what the threat is. If you can't see this enterprise then you can't fight it. If you can't define it clearly in law, then you can't tell the detective these are the elements that we must go look out for to prove this thing. I think that's an area of scholarship worth looking at: what are we required to look at? Chapter 4 of the Organized Crime Act has not defined it properly.

Do you know there's no definition of "organised crime" in law enforcement? That is the area of scholarship that requires particular study. There is an approach to detectives study and I was trained as a detective at a specialised unit level that looked at crime from a crime scene point of view. In other words: there's the body; the house has been broken into. You work from the literal in front of you up to identifying the perpetrator. However, money laundering doesn't have a crime scene. A syndicated crime picture is not going to present itself to you suddenly when you're seeing a

body in a park laying on the street. You're not going to see the concept. It requires a different level of understanding, a different form of analysis.

Now, unfortunately in our intelligence environment we're focused – research wise – on quantitative techniques to determine a threat: How many bodies do we see? How many murders do we see a day? What we need to learn is qualitative analysis and that is the challenge of scholarship. We don't have that experience. We didn't have it in the police. So we count things. We do not engage in that kind of qualitative analysis. So we need greater input from the academic environment to assist us in that particular environment.

Lastly, in terms of community governance, what I've seen worked, is where we have strong community structures and the experiences explained by the previous processes, it does crowd out the space which gangs control.

9

Remarks on gangsterism, organised crime, violence, and structural neglect: historical roots of gangsterism in the Western Cape

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Introduction

South Africa and indeed the Western Cape has been in the grip of gang violence over a number of years. Gangs have a long history in South Africa, and the earliest gangs were those that were formed in the prisons in the early 1900's. Charles van Onselen (2008) goes to great lengths to give us a history of Nongaloza,

the original leader of the 28-prison gang in his history of the Witwatersrand.

He emphasised how the other prison gangs were breakaway gangs from the 28-gang. So, the 27s, 26s and later the Big Fives, and Fast Elevens were formed in prison around scarce resources and to challenge the authority of the prison guards.

The seminar today provides a useful resource list of resourceful researchers into the gang problem in Cape Town, and I hope that we can provide some insights into the genesis and changes in the problem.

Structural antecedents of gang violence

Some of the structural antecedents has been pointed out in works by early gang researchers such as Don Pinnock (1984) in his seminal work, *The Brotherhoods*. In it he identified some structural reasons for the growth of gang violence on then emergent Cape Flats. He noted the forced removals of black people from the inner city of Cape Town and surrounds, particularly District Six. I want to argue here that as new communities took shape through National Party apartheid planning, the old gang allegiances of the District Six survived and was catapulted into the new communities' people were forced into. Separate development was the official policy of the apartheid government and people were moved to communities that largely had the names of some of the more popular streets in District Six. Lavender Hill for instance were populated by people who originally had lived in Lavender Street; Hanover Park was named after Hanover Street, according to Ms Eulalie Stott, former chairperson of the City of Cape Town Housing Committee.

In these new communities of the Cape Flats, a fear of the "other" seeped into the making of community and it took years for people who were not from the same communities they were moved from, to begin to trust one another (see Field, 2001). Unemployment became a curse

and several commissions of inquiry were established to understand the plight of the coloured male.

Steffen Jensen (2008) provides us with a fantastic explanation and good research into how the National Party rationalised the role of coloured men and how they were labelled became *skollies*.

In the process, poverty was criminalised.

The trajectory of development of gangs is the subject of much research and several scholars: Van Onselen (1982) considered the genesis of the prison gangs; Lotter and Shurinck (1984) investigated the cultures of prison gangs; Pinnock (1982, 1984, 1987) provided analyses of gangs and later went on to describe the rites and rituals of young men in different contexts. Much later in 2016, he provided a causal analysis of the attraction to gangs. My own view is this is closer to biological explanations of why young men join gangs.

Wilfried Schärf (1986, 1990) provided a useful understanding of The Firm (1986) organised crime and the resurgence of urban gangs and community responses.

In 1995 I made the analogy that there are three periods in which communities responded differently to gangsterism (Kinnes, 1995). I pointed out that during the first period from 1973 to 1976, when there was a very violent but organised approach to gangs from communities across the Western Cape. In the absence of a clear police strategy, communities united under the banner of a vigilante social movement called the "Peacemakers", which started in Manenberg and spread quickly to other areas.

The second period of community response to gangsterism lasted from 1976

to 1984. This saw a heightened political consciousness among a more critical generation of youth. During these early formative years, there was a decline in gangsterism as many people were imprisoned and detained under the state of emergency.

The third period of community action ranged from 1985–1995 to the present and saw gangs increasing in number to become a more organised force than ever before in the Western Cape.

I have since revised this because of the frames and because gangs were quick to set up power bases during this period, communities in the 1980s and early 1990s found themselves having to negotiate with gang leaders to ensure peace deals. With different communities negotiating separate peace agreements with gang leaders, it became apparent that syndicate gangs were more organised in some communities.

Period from 1994–present

If we focus on the period from 1994 to 2026 gang impasse, then we have to consider a number of factors including the history and gang typologies once so clearly demarcated by Pinnock (1984). Pinnock's gang typologies has since his research undergone a massive change. The street/defence gangs, family mafia structures and syndicate gangs have been eclipsed after 1994 by far more organised corporate gang structures that decentralised their activities. They also became far more organised (Kinnes, 2000).

The world of gang violence has significantly changed as a result of the liberation experienced in the young democracy and the transition from an authoritarian to a democratic government

led to a significant lowering of official social controls with respect to the free movement of people, freedom of expression and freedom of association. These freedoms were later made official in 1996 with the adoption of the Bill of Rights and the promulgation of the South African Constitution (1996).

The pre- and post-1994 period provide great upheaval across the city of Cape Town with periods of great gang wars that divided many communities and saw many fatalities and injuries on the Cape Flats. The periods, 1993; 1996; 1998; 2002; 2006; 2011 and 2013 were known for inter-gang rivalry and wars.

The period 1996–2002 was known for an exceptionally brutal Cape Flats war between gangs represented by The Firm and Core, People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD) and the police. This period was marked by gangs decentralising its activities, establishing branches in different communities and becoming organised (Standing, 1996). By 2014, 464 out of 2580 murders (18%) were gang related, according to a SAPS presentation to Parliament. By 2026, the bigger gangs such as the Sexy Boys, Hard Livings, Americans, Josters, and other gangs were facing a war with the Fancy Boys gangs on the Cape Flats. The tactics of gangs in the townships of Nyanga and Khayelitsha changed to extortion and mass killings.

State responses

A number of attempts have been made by the state to “arrest the gang problem”, with little success. The state and particularly the SAPS engaged in a process of operations against the gangs (Kinnes, 2017). These operations against the gangs suffered from a lack of



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proper planning, little to no evaluation and competition and distrust between members of the different police units that were meant to police them.

By 2018, the police relaunched the Anti-Gang Unit (AGU) in Hanover Park with much fanfare. Unfortunately, the resources, structure and organisation of the AGU was challenged by the internal factions of the police and resources were stripped away. The deputy provincial police commissioner at the time established a Major Offences Reaction Team (MORT) that took away the detectives attached to the AGU. Later, one of the senior detectives, Colonel Charl Kinnear, was murdered by gang members, and a police officer was also implicated and is currently attending trial.

In the interceding years between 1996–2018, the state implemented several strategies and designed several policies which had a limited effect on gangs.

These included:

- The Drug Master Plan;
- Prevention of Organised Crime Act 121 of 1998 (POCA);
- Provincial Gang Prevention Strategy (2008);
- National Anti-Gang Strategy (NICOC) 2015;
- Western Cape Safety Plan (1); and
- Western Cape Safety Plan (11)

It is one of the biggest admissions of failure for the state to now have decided to bring in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) to support

police operations. While only being here for a few months, it is clear that the presence of the SANDF will bring a temporary reprieve from the gang violence. In the longer term, it is not sustainable to continue to have the SANDF deployed alongside the SAPS. The lessons from the 2019 Operation Proper are clear that the crime rate and gang violence did not die down while the SANDF was policing the Cape Flats. The sustainability element for the reduction of violence is that firstly, the army does not consult with communities when they are deployed. Secondly, the levels of co-operation between the SAPS and the army was minimal and conflict emerged on their intelligence assessments.

Lastly, the operational and deployment ethos between the police and army is different. It is when the army leaves the communities that the gangs regain the upper hand when it comes to extortion and violence. In fact, seven people were shot at Mitchell's Plain taxi rank on Tuesday, 7 April 2026 when the current SANDF soldiers were on patrol on the Cape Flats (Dean, 2026).

The question then is what should be done and what our indicators for success should be and what the evidence for success should be? I want to suggest that we need to begin to look at youth investment through youth development and programmes to begin to reinvest in communities.

Investing in youth

We have seen the post-1994 democratic government move towards what J. P. Brodeur call "low policing". By this he meant everyday policing through visible police patrols

and detectives going about their daily routine investigations. But by 1998, the new government returned to high policing with investments in state machinery in the Criminal Justice System such as the Integrated Justice System Revamp process.

Despite these investments in the state, there was also an investment in youth programmes pioneered by the National Youth Development Agency. There has also been a turn to social development grants instead of building social capital.

In addition, we have seen the near abandonment of some communities on the Cape Flats such as Kreeft, Nyanga, Browns Farm, Sweet Home, Phillipi East, and the Marikana informal settlement.

Investment in youth services and school youth programmes has not seen similar investments as for the police and other arms of the criminal justice system. It is clear that a much bigger investment should be made in youth programmes to counteract young people gravitating to gangs.

Can the state succeed?

The state has shown that it can succeed through focussed and collaborative programmes between the arms of the state. In the following cases, the state succeeded in getting convictions against big groups of gang leaders in two trials: *S v Shamiel Eyssen* (Fancy Boys, 2007) and *S v Mallick Petersen +15 others* (Fancy Boys, 2013).

These cases were built up over years with painstaking investigations by groups of detectives who eventually succeeded in getting these leaders jailed. They were focussed investigations and required skill

and expertise, and collaboration with prosecutors of the National Prosecutions Authority.

The problem with long sentences is that the leaders of the Fancy Boys gang came back after an absence of over ten years. They are reclaiming lost ground, are highly organised and are using Askari tactics¹ to recruit leaders of their rival gangs.

Some lessons

Over thirty years of fighting gangs have taught the people of the Cape Flats some valuable lessons. Firstly, we should recognise that state “victories” against gangs are temporary. Evidence for this is the

- return of Fancy Boys;
- return of PAGAD;
- emergence of newer gangs and new leaders; and
- strengthening the Number gangs in prison with long term sentences.

Other lessons learnt:

- gang wars are lasting longer (Hanover Park, Manenberg, Westbury, Eldorado Park);
- there is a greater availability of firearms at the National Firearms Registry;
- the state is not making significant investment in youth that can make a difference;
- the state has no lasting and engaging strategy in investing in working with communities in the longer term;
- it has designed strategies to fight gangs with a “boots on the ground mentality”;

- this has not worked as we see from the first Community Safety Plan;
- 1000 Boots on the Ground have been placed in Phillippi East, where mass killings continue;
- mass shootings have resulted;
- the state through Provincial Police Board and SAPS are undoing community co-operation through suspending Community Police Forums (Mitchell’s Plain, Elsies River, Durbanville);
- police station commissioners cannot decide who should be the community’s leaders, the apartheid police did this with their counterinsurgency strategy “Winning the Hearts and Minds” (WHAM);
- SAPS and Provincial Police Board are engaging in community politics of suspending CPFs instead of working and developing a sustainable capacity building programme through training CPF members;
- it would be an important element of a turnaround strategy to build an enabling environment for creation of jobs for young people;
- public safety requires that provincial government departments, the City of Cape Town and the SAPS do not play politics with people’s lives; and
- the gangs have shown that they will grow and govern certain sections of communities

Conclusion

If there is no political will and politicians continue on their current trajectory, there will be no significant

progress to turn around communities in which gangsters thrive.

We can only learn from the events in Haiti where armed gangsters control 90% of the capital, Port-au-Prince.

Note

¹ “Askari tactics” refer to the methods used by the old apartheid regime to recruit ANC members and turn them against the ANC.

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SECTION D

Criminal justice design system failure

Four contributors, Prof Shernaaz Carelse and Dr Nomvuyo Lukelelo, Jordan Pieters, Imam Prof Rashied Omar, and Brig Lindiwe Dyantyi, engage four central questions: Is there a failure in the design and functioning of the state and criminal justice system? Where and why has the state failed? What roles do community and faith-based organisations play? What place do youth organisations occupy in combating gangsterism? And, ultimately, is a system of community governance possible?

Collectively, their contributions offer a layered and critical account of gangsterism on the Cape Flats, framing it not as isolated criminality but as the outcome of deep systemic failure. They call for a shift away from state-centric, punitive approaches toward community-driven, youth-centred, and structurally informed interventions.

Gangsterism as intersection

Across these perspectives, gangsterism emerges at the intersection of historical design,

institutional weakness, social fragmentation, and adaptive criminal economies. Both the state and criminal networks function as systems; however, while the former is marked by incoherence and fragmentation, the latter exhibits a troubling degree of organisation, responsiveness, and embeddedness in everyday life.

All contributors point to clear failures within the state and criminal justice system. This failure is less a matter of deliberate design than of systemic dysfunction, evident in outdated legislation, weak regulatory frameworks, and a prison system that allows criminal networks to operate internally.

Governance is further undermined by fragmented, siloed interventions across departments, chronic under-resourcing, corruption, and a profound erosion of trust between communities and law enforcement. Dyantyi highlights the state's inability to curb the flow of firearms and drugs, while Carelse and Lukelelo locate gangsterism within historically engineered inequality, where

apartheid spatial planning and socio-economic exclusion created conditions for gangs to function as alternative structures of belonging and survival.

Dyantyi deepens this analysis by foregrounding the political economy of crime. Gangsterism is embedded in networks of power, patronage, and illicit markets that intersect with formal institutions, blurring the boundary between legality and criminality. This suggests not only systemic failure but, at times, forms of complicity or uneasy coexistence.

Criminal justice failure

The state's shortcomings are both structural and operational. Structurally, they lie in the persistence of inequality, spatial injustice, and economic exclusion that continue to shape life on the Cape Flats. Operationally, they are evident in the state's inability to provide safety, opportunity, and dignity, particularly for young people. This manifests as a failure of coordination across departments, weaknesses in the education system, and insufficient investment in youth development, social services, and community infrastructure. Equally significant is a relational failure: the erosion of trust between communities and institutions, exacerbated by corruption and perceived neglect. Pieters adds a critical dimension by pointing to the "elite capture" of discourse, where well-resourced NGOs often speak about, rather than with, affected communities, thereby reinforcing exclusion and limiting impact.

Across all four accounts, the state's failure is thus not only one of capacity but of orientation, a persistent

misrecognition of gangsterism as primarily a criminal issue rather than a systemic one.

Civic organisations as agents of reconstruction

In contrast, community and faith-based organisations are positioned as vital agents of resistance and reconstruction. Omar emphasises their moral and ethical authority, grounded in a prophetic responsibility to uphold the sanctity of life, resist the normalisation of violence, and hold the state accountable. Beyond moral critique, these organisations foster social cohesion by creating safe spaces, facilitating dialogue, offering mediation, and developing youth programmes. Carelse and Lukelelo similarly stress the importance of collaborative, community-based approaches that bring together local actors, educators, social workers, religious leaders, and civic organisations, to address the structural roots of gangsterism.

These contributions also highlight processes of healing and resilience-building, particularly through addressing intergenerational trauma and fostering collective care. Community and faith organisations play a central role in advancing forms of grassroots governance, including street committees, neighbourhood watches, and informal safety networks. Dyantyi extends this by underscoring the importance of organised civil society in disrupting the political and economic systems that sustain crime, while Pieters cautions that civil society itself is uneven, often reproducing internal hierarchies and exclusions. Meaningful engagement therefore requires a reorientation toward

grassroots knowledge, participation, and leadership.

Youth organisations occupy a pivotal yet precarious position within this landscape. Carelse and Lukelelo argue that young people must be recognised not merely as targets of intervention but as active agents in diagnosing problems and designing solutions. This requires creating viable alternatives to gang affiliation through education, employment pathways, and opportunities for social and economic participation. Dyantyi situates youth marginalisation within a broader political economy, where exclusion from formal markets drives engagement in informal and illicit economies. Pieters adds that youth organising is severely constrained by resource scarcity and limited institutional support, calling for genuine intergenerational collaboration in which youth leadership is both recognised and resourced. Omar, meanwhile, highlights the resilience and moral agency of young people, emphasising their active role in practices of resistance and renewal.

Community governance

The question of community governance emerges as a critical point of convergence. Omar argues that such governance is not only possible but already taking shape through “governance from below”, street committees, neighbourhood networks, and informal safety structures rooted in collective decision-making and mutual accountability. This vision of a “safety

commons” aligns with Carelse and Lukelelo’s emphasis on community ownership and systemic collaboration. Dyantyi supports this perspective while cautioning that local initiatives must engage broader political and economic structures to be effective. Pieters, in turn, highlights the internal challenges facing community governance, including inequality, resource constraints, and the marginalisation of grassroots voices.

Conclusion: Towards a fundamental reorientation

The four contributions converge on a central insight: gangsterism on the Cape Flats is sustained by a complex system in which historical injustice, state failure, and adaptive criminal networks are deeply intertwined. Addressing this crisis requires more than intensified policing or incremental reform. It demands a fundamental reorientation, one in which the state confronts its structural and operational failures, civil society and faith-based organisations assume a more coordinated and central role, and youth are recognised and supported as key agents of change. The emergence of community-based governance practices suggests that alternative models of safety and social organisation are already underway. The central challenge lies in recognising, resourcing, and scaling these initiatives while simultaneously addressing the systemic conditions that continue to reproduce gangsterism.

10

Guidelines for a framework for youth and community organisations' participation in combating gangsterism on the Cape Flats: A Social Work perspective

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Introduction

The contemporary state of the Cape Flats is the result of an "urban master plan" designed for exclusion based on race. From the colonial era to the formalisation of apartheid in 1948, the Cape Flats was engineered to house those deemed "nonpersons" by the apartheid government (Madell and Murray, 2025; Stoffberg, 2023). Inevitably, the implementation of the Population Registration Act No 50 of

1950 and the Group Areas Act No 41 of 1950 had profound psychological and physical consequences on Black, Coloured, and Indian South Africans in terms of forced displacement and fractured established social support networks (Goba, 2023; Straus, 2019). This socioeconomic and political fracturing led to a loss of identity, being reduced to racial classifications, leaving many in a state between "belonging and not belonging" (Bradley, 2015; Daven-

port, 2020; Richmond and Charnley, 2022). For example, the Bantu Education Act No 47 of 1953 and its derivatives for Black, Coloured and Indian youth ensured an inferior standard of learning, effectively emasculating the population by restricting their access to the formal, skilled economy, resulting in psychological restrictions, which we linked to what Patel (n.d.), and Connor and Robbins (2023) refer to as the colonisation of the mind (Bartilow, 2023; Connor and Robbins, 2024; Patel, n.d.; Mbatha, 2024; Mvalo, 2022).

The proliferation of criminal gang activity is inextricably linked to the lingering legacy of the apartheid regime. Decades after apartheid, the communities of the Cape Flats in the Western Cape face a continuous onslaught of violence, predominantly brought about by rival gangs competing for drug territories. In this vacuum of state reliability, street gangs have emerged as pivotal institutions. They function as a substitute support system, providing power, acceptance, and a sense of purpose (Dykes et al., 2025). For youth lacking safety at home or success in a broken school system, the criminal industry offers an immediate, albeit destructive, path to fulfilling belonging and income needs (Dykes, et al., 2024; Qwetha-Daza, 2022; Van der Linde, 2022).

Socio-economic deficiencies, such as the high unemployment rate in the Western Cape (albeit the province with the lowest unemployment rate in South Africa), rob young from the Cape Flats in particular, people of reaching the goals or levels of well-being they should theoretically be able to achieve (Le Fleur,

2022; Njani, 2022). The absence of "safety and social belonging" among Cape Flats youth creates a persistent deficit, forcing them to fluctuate in a state of survival rather than growth (Higgenson et al., 2015; Dykes et al., 2021; Einarsson and Ljungkrantz, 2022).

Moreover, the lack of positive "vicarious experiences" observing gang leaders achieve "success" while corporate professionals remain invisible, conditions self-efficacy toward destructive ends (Bandura, 1986; Dykes, et al., 2025; Stoffberg, 2023).

Our research on youth in gangs (from a social work perspective) over the past few years examined the pervasive influence of gang violence on young people and social systems within South Africa's Cape Flats communities. We highlight the strained communication between parents and children while exploring the limited alternatives available to youth who are drawn into criminal organisations.

In previous studies, we addressed the significant safety hazards faced by social workers and educators who attempt to provide essential services in these high-risk neighbourhoods. By focusing on both youth and service providers' perspectives regarding the impact of gangsterism on youth well-being, it illustrates the complex barriers to effective youth welfare interventions. Our body of work on youth in gangs emphasises the urgent need for community-based support to protect vulnerable populations from systemic instability (Dykes et al., 2021; 2024; 2025; Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo, 2021).

The purpose of this paper contribution is to consider that the allure of youth

Concept	Tiers of need Sources of efficacy	Real-world application of youth on the Cape Flats
Self-actualisation (Maslow)	Physiological	Threatened by extreme poverty and the deprivation of basic sustenance.
	Safety	Compromised by systemic gangsterism and pervasive neighbourhood violence.
	Social belonging	Undermined by family fragmentation and a lack of authentic cultural identity.
	Esteem	Impacted by internalised marginalisation and a lack of positive modelling.
Self-Efficacy (Bandura)	Individual experiences	Personally succeeding or failing at tasks within the environment.
	Emotional states	Managing anxiety or self-doubt when confronted with challenges.
	Vicarious experiences	Observing peers succeed or fail (often favouring the "success" of criminals).
	Verbal persuasion	Being encouraged or discouraged by social support figures.

Table 1: Components of personal potential of youth on the Cape Flats Context

in gangs on the Cape Flats requires a lens that transcends simple criminality to view the phenomenon as a rational response to historical and systemic exclusion of Black and Coloured youth. Within these marginalised spaces, gangs effectively fill a financial niche and provide a sense of belonging that state institutions and traditional family structures, often fractured by socio-economic pressure, have failed to provide (Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo, 2021).

Theoretical frameworks

We propose a dual theoretical lens employing Maslow's theory on the Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943; 1954), specifically in regard to self-actualisation and Bandura's Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) regarding self-efficacy to contextualise youths' potential (see Table 1).

We contend that psychological barriers are the direct legacy of historical forces that sought to restrict Coloured

and Black youth's development. Therefore, to design effective social work interventions, we must move beyond the symptoms of gangsterism to the individual's internal psychological states that draw them into gangsterism. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Bandura's Social-Cognitive Theory provide a robust framework for assessing the personal potential of youth in disadvantaged communities such as the Cape Flats.

To appraise the survival strategies of marginalised youth, we also propose a dual theoretical framework drawing on Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and Critical Race Theory as proposed by Bell (1970), Crenshaw (1989), and Galgardo and Stefancic (2017). See Table 2.

Understanding these theoretical drivers is essential to appraising the methodology used to capture the voices of those navigating these volatile systems daily. In our experience as, social

Theoretical framework	Application to gang-ravaged communities	Focus on survival and resilience
Ecological Systems Theory	Analyses youth development across nested environments, from micro-systems (family) to macro-systems (societal structures).	Evaluates how chronic environmental stressors necessitate extreme resilience and how systems must be reconfigured to support the individual.
Critical Race Theory (CRT)	Examines the socio-political landscape of the Cape Flats as a direct result of apartheid-era spatial engineering and systemic racism.	Highlights how historical exclusion and lack of institutional access drive the development of alternative, often illicit, survival and economic structures.

Table 2: Dual theoretical framework to appraise survival strategies of marginalised youth

workers and academics who have studied this phenomenon for several years, we have found that youth navigate these pressures through different levels of interaction in their environment, categorised by their ability to either succumb to or overcome their context. For example, at the most basic level is the matter of youth unemployment, which is characterised by economic idleness (see Chauke [2023], NEET: Not in Education, Employment, or Training).

Secondly, criminality by engaging in illicit activities while providing income actively diminishes the fabric of society. For these youth, formal employment, while providing stability, is often perceived as a continuation of systemic subjugation; a form of corporate slavery that demands conformity over uniqueness (Dykes et al., 2021; 2023; 2025; Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo, 2021).

In this scoping review on youth and community participation to mitigate gangsterism, we have explored interventions for overcoming gang involvement, taking into account the awareness and expression of individual uniqueness to create social value and

economic mobility for youth on the Cape Flats. We contend that the mitigation of gangsterism requires a paradigm shift from symptomatic treatment to possibility development because we maintain that overcoming the weight of historic and systemic injustice is a matter of fostering creative self-efficacy and supporting youth as they differentiate themselves from their environment.

Research methodology

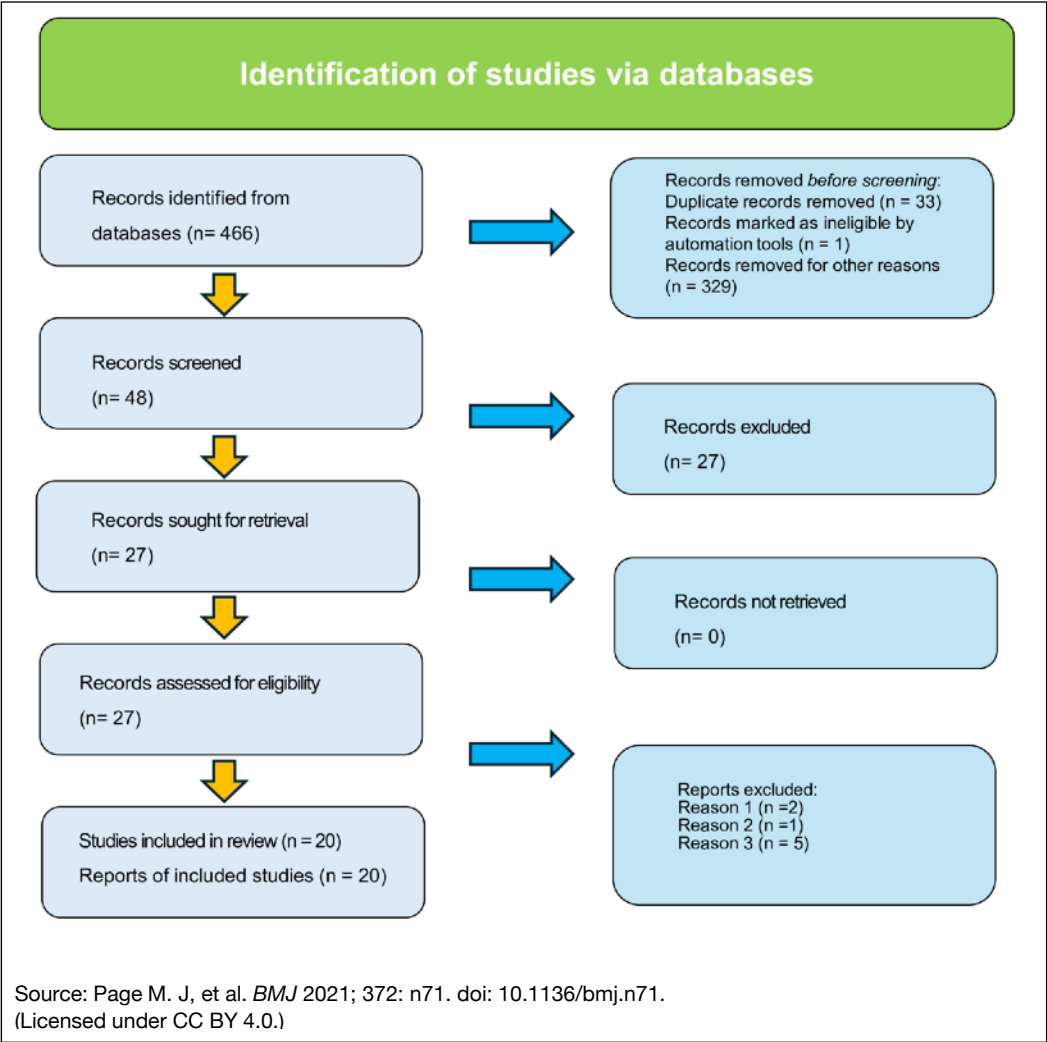
Scoping review on youth and community participation aimed at mitigating youth involvement in gangsterism.

The purpose of this contribution is to present the findings of a scoping review we conducted, which was guided by Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) methodological framework that allowed us to summarise and disseminate the research findings and to identify gaps in the existing literature on youth and community participation to mitigate youth involvement in gangsterism. The following five stages of Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework were followed in conducting this scoping review:

Stage 1: Identify the research question

The primary research question that guided the scoping review was: What components are required for a framework involving youth and community participation aimed at mitigating youth involvement in gangsterism? The following supporting questions were developed during the review process to address specific areas of the primary research question:

- What is the role of community organisations in developing a framework to garner youth participation to combat gangsterism?
- What is the role of youth organisations in developing a framework to garner youth participation to combat gangsterism?
- What support networks are required for a framework involving youth and community participation, aimed at



PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for systematic reviews which included searches of database

mitigating youth involvement in gangsterism?

Stage 2: Identify relevant studies

Searches of 11 databases were conducted in March 2026: Cambridge Core, Elsevier, Google Scholar, JSTOR, Oxford Journals, Sabinet African Journals, Sage publications, Science Direct, Scopus, Springer, and Taylor and Francis online journals. A total of 466 articles were found, of which 28 met the inclusion criteria and were fully screened. The checklist Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) was used to (1) identify titles deemed suitable, based on the keywords, (2) screen abstracts, based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and (3) select studies that met the study criteria.

Search terms included: "guidelines for youth and community participation to mitigate gangsterism", "guidelines for youth and community participation to combat gangsterism", "frameworks for youth and community participation to combat gangsterism", "frameworks for youth and community participation to mitigate gangsterism", "support networks required in youth participation frameworks to combat gangsterism", and "support networks required in frameworks to mitigate gangsterism".

Stage 3: Study selection

The following inclusion criteria were set: English, full-text, peer-reviewed, open-access studies conducted between 2020 and 2026 on components required for a framework involving youth and community participation aimed at

mitigating youth involvement in gangsterism. The date parameters ensured that only recent studies were considered. The exclusion criteria were studies on the topic in languages other than English, paid content, and older than 2020. A data extraction sheet, as proposed by Peters et al. (2020), was used.

Of the 28 studies that met the inclusion criteria, 20 were qualitative, 1 quantitative, 1 quasi-experimental study, two mixed methods, 2 systematic/literature review, and 2 document analysis. Most studies were conducted in South Africa (20), two in other African countries (Nigeria, Sierra Leone). Studies outside Africa included UK (1), North America (5). For the final sample, we also excluded the two African studies conducted in Nigeria and Sierra Leone as we wanted to specifically focus on a South African perspective, with particular attention to township communities in South Africa with similar characteristics as the Cape Flats.

Stage 4: Charting the data

We engaged in a process of developing the data charting form of which the variables were: author(s) and year in which the study was published, the country where the study was conducted, aims, purpose or objectives of the study, research population and sample size, research methodology and data instruments used, as well as key findings.

The following four main themes emerged during the process of data extraction:

- Strategies for youth empowerment aimed at addressing gangsterism;



Prof Shernaaz Carelse
Screen grab, Jaap Durand Chair video, UWC

- Strategies for multi-sector collaboration;
- Strategies for prevention and intervention services;
- Systemic barriers in the implementation of a framework involving youth and community participation aimed at mitigating youth joining gangs.

Stage 5: Collating, summarising and reporting the findings

We conducted an independent analysis of the data following the 6 steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2005) for thematic analysis in qualitative studies. We then conducted a consensus consultation and reached agreement on the final themes for inclusion. An agreement was reached on the interpretation of findings and their implications for social work practice aimed at youth and community participation in combating gangsterism.

Discussion

The findings from the 20 peer-reviewed articles on a framework to mitigate the allure of youth to gangs highlight that gangsterism should be treated as a systemic social problem solvable through business-minded solutions and community-led initiatives. Based on the 20 studies reviewed, we propose the following components for a social entrepreneurial framework aimed at mitigating youth involvement in gangs:

1. Key strategies for youth empowerment aimed at addressing gangsterism

- *Skills and vocational training:* Providing trade and technical pathways (e.g., technical and trade schools) to create concrete exit strategies from gang life into legitimate employment is foremost to break the cycle of gangsterism. Skills and training

- focusing on vicarious learning by providing educational opportunities other than formal schooling, including creative entrepreneurship, is a viable career path that youth could explore. However, these initiatives and strategies should follow a democratic approach prioritising the participation of youth community organisations and parents as well as other role players such as educators and school social workers in decision-making (Iheadiri, 2022; 2023; Chauke, 2023; Gosh, 2023; Plaatjies and Dziewanski, 2023; Stoffberg, 2023).
- *Alternative livelihoods*: Developing alternative pathways for sustainable economic livelihoods through the formal economy is often challenging for youth from the Cape Flats due to their poor schooling attendance, particularly for those who come from broken homes and second or third generation gang involvement. Alternative options such as social enterprises, could offer them job placement and entrepreneurship specifically for high-risk youth, directly challenging the "financial niche" gangs currently occupy. Youth participation in the Green Economy is one such possibility in which they could start their own recycling business in the growing green economic market (Van der Westhuizen and Galuwayo, 2021; Dybbroe Viltoft, 2022; Machethe et al., 2022; Stoffberg, 2023; Chauke, 2023; Pertus and Davids, 2023; Dykes, et al., 2024; Thornton, 2024; Sithubisi et al., 2025).
- *The "Good Lives" approach*: Good lives initiatives focused on enhancing youths' internal skills and external opportunities to reduce the need for gang identity. This includes partnerships with organisations that offer structured support necessary for identity reconstruction among school-going children. However, due to financial constraints, many such projects terminate and are discontinued despite its positive impact on primary and high school learners in the Cape Metropole. One such project still in operation is the Amy Biehl Foundation which is effective in providing learners with extracurricular and life-skills education. Other suggestions by Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo (2021) are the incorporation of arts and cultural activities, such as music and dance programmes, to get youth involved in extra-curricular activities (Davids et al., 2022; Chauke, 2023; Dziewanski, 2023; Stoffberg, 2023).
- *Symbolic modelling*: Replacing the "cool" image of the gangster with the successful image of being part of the workforce, either the formal or informal sector. It will require collective action from all relevant stakeholders to provide support, infrastructure for the creative entrepreneur by creating opportunities for social entrepreneurial enterprises, such for example as content creators, recycling, street art to name a few of the possibilities that are low hanging fruit reasonably accessible given the right support and exposure (Van der Westhuizen, 2021; Davids et al., 2022; Machethe, 2022; Viltoft, 2022; Ndwandwe, 2024; Thornton, 2024).

Youth economic inclusion, however, must be paired with broad-based community mobilisation to be sustainable. Possibilities that could be explored are small businesses in and outside the Cape Flats investing financially and in terms of infrastructure in these endeavours, assisting youth with start-up and financial literacy skills.

1. *Multi-Sector Collaboration*

Addressing the complexity of gangsterism on the Cape Flats requires multi-pronged solutions where government functions as a partner to civil society rather than a distant overseer. This involves integrating departments such as health, housing, sports, and arts into a holistic plan. The following social partnership strategies are proposed:

- *Multi-sector collaboration:* Integration of the South African Police Service (SAPS), local government, civil society, and the private sector to move beyond siloed, reactive responses (Machethe et al., 2022; Chauke, 2023; Iheadiri, 2023; Petrus and Davids, 2023; Plaatjies and Dziewanski, 2023; Sithubi, 2025).
- *Credible messengers:* Utilising "violence interrupters", who are essentially community outreach workers and most often religious leaders who mediate conflicts between rival gangs. NGOs play a vital role in providing activities such as drama and art, music and dance as well as sport to enhance skills and knowledge during high-risk after-school hours, such as the Amy Bhiel Foundation (Machethe et al., 2022; Iheadiri, 2023; Dziewanski, 2023; iFearLess, 2025; Sithubi, 2025).

- *Spatial design:* Implementing social crime prevention projects that address environmental vulnerabilities, such as improving the infrastructure of housing to reduce the physical opportunities for gang control. Community leaders, community members and ward counsellors have a key role to play in terms of spatial design to curb and detour gang violence (Ngema and Du Plessis, 2024).

2. *Prevention and Intervention Services*

Services must be age-calibrated for maximum impact. The agency of Cape Flats youth remains their most powerful tool. When youth are equipped to look at their context objectively, they gain the power to choose a path defined by their own potential rather than the limitations of their past.

- *Adopt a "Positive Lens":* Identify and nurture unique talents (artistic, athletic, entrepreneurial) as primary tools for intervention rather than focusing solely on poverty or crime (Van der Westhuizen, 2021; Petrus and Davids et al., 2023; Machethe et al., 2022; Vilttoft, 2022; Gosh, 2023; Ndwandwe, 2024; Thornton, 2024; Stoffberg, 2023).
- *Early intervention:* Targets youth with social skills training and school-based safety committees to counter gang initiation (Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo, 2021; Chauke, 2023; Dziewanski, 2023; Petrus and Davids, 2023; Sithubi, 2025).
- *Family and support systems:* Include family-centric dialogue and parenting training to address the normalisation of gang membership within family

units (Davids et al., 2023; Gosh, 2023; Dykes et al., 2025).

- *Prosocial alternatives:* Offer a range of programme components like arts and sports to provide a sense of belonging outside of gang structures (Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo, 2021; Davids et al., 2022; Dybbroe Viltoft, 2022; Gosh, 2023).
- *Exit strategies:* Tertiary prevention must provide active members with substance abuse treatment, tattoo removal, and relocation support as just a few examples for exit strategies (Machethe et al., 2022; Petrus and Davids, 2023; Thornton, 2024).

1. Systemic barriers in the implementation of a social entrepreneurial framework aimed at mitigating youth joining gangs

The implementation of a social entrepreneurial framework faces significant systemic barriers that require more than just local effort. They require an immense shift in political will. The "lack of political will" is a complex issue, often tied to the very instability that gangs thrive upon. Critical challenges identified in the context include:

- *Siloed operations:* There is an increase in counterproductive competition between agencies for limited resources and funding (Machethe et al., 2022; Gosh, 2023; Ndwende, 2024; Dykes et al., 2025; Sithubi et al., 2025).
- *Extortion risks:* The targeting of legitimate small businesses for "protection fees" stifles entrepreneurial growth (Mdlungu, 2025).



Dr. Nomvuyo Lukelelo
Issuu

- *Infiltration:* There is a constant threat of gangs co-opting small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) to gain economic power and community legitimacy. SAPS and ward councillors will be key in tackling this growing phenomenon in communities on the Cape Flats in which small business owners in particular are hard hit (Mdlungu and Pillay, 2025).
- *Infrastructural deficits:* The urgent need for stronger collaboration and infrastructure development between SAPS, local government, and civil society is another growing concern with the persistent deterioration of infrastructure on the Cape Flats with very little to no progress being observed to improve such conditions (Davids et al., 2022; Plaatjies and Dziewanski, 2023; Stoffberg, 2023;

Ngema, and Du Plessis, 2024; iFearLess, 2025).

Conclusion and recommendations

Top-down, punitive strategies to mitigate youth joining gangs have reached their limit. Collaborative models, exemplified by the iFearLess, ceasefire projects and neighbourhood watches (NHWs), prove that community ownership is the only viable path to reducing gang activities on the Cape Flats. Coupled with community ownership, social entrepreneurship, focused on job creation, youth resilience, and community cohesion, offers a transformative path forward in mitigating youth allure to gangs. Furthermore, by providing legitimate support structures, such as education support and small-business resources, youth on the Cape Flats stand a better chance of being empowered to build positive anti-gang values.

We highlighted the profound psychosocial, socio-economic and socio-political gaps in current intervention strategies and assert that a framework to address gangsterism shifts the focus from purely law enforcement to treating gangs as a systemic social problem solvable through youth and community-led participation, business-minded solutions and youth and community-led initiatives.

We furthermore posit that social entrepreneurship as a viable option for youth empowerment is not merely a safety strategy; it is an economic reclamation project. Until the financial "niche" of gangs is replaced by a robust social entrepreneurial ecosystem on the Cape Flats, the cycle of youth being lured to gangsterism will persist.

We propose the prioritisation of diverse perspectives on gangsterism and the mitigating factors to get youth out of gangs through engaging the following cohorts:

Youth: Directly capturing the drivers of recruitment, daily survival, and the perceived benefits of gang membership. Involving youth in guiding discussions through community workshops to advise service providers such as youth development organisations, community organisations, SAPS, educators, community leaders, ward councillors regarding frameworks for youth participation in mitigating gangsterism in their communities.

Parents / Guardians / Carers: Assessing the substantial and enduring psychological and social effects of gang violence on the family unit and offering support services to parents based on their own assessment of the type of support services they require.

Service providers: Service providers from all spheres, including social workers, school psychologists, business owners in the communities, educators, principals, community leaders, civil society organisations, SAPS, religious organisations, ward counsellors, etc have a pivotal role to play in ensuring youth and community based organisation are intrinsically involved in any programme aimed at mitigating gangsterism on the Cape Flats.

We contend that stakeholders such as social workers, community and youth organisations must invest in the "system", not just the "incident", shifting the focus from merely reacting to a single aspect (incident) to fixing the underlying

systemic/structural complexities (system), urging role-players to proactivity rather than reactivity address root causes of youth being lured to gangs by treating gangsterism as a systemic social problem rather than an isolated criminal justice issue.

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11

The token young activist in the room

Jordan Pieters

Documentary filmmaker
Cape Town

Greetings, one and all. Thank you for the invitation to here with you today.

As the token young activist here, I feel obliged and spiritually compelled to tell you about a TikTok video I saw last night.

It was of a young lady and it has stayed with me. The young lady was journalling her experience of sleeping in her car each night, here at UWC. She was unable to afford accommodation but wanted to continue her degree and such, each night she sleeps in her car, in a parking lot somewhere here on campus.

It would be remiss of me to be in this space, in this moment and not speak to the ways in which institutions of higher learning rip the dignity away from young

people. Their dreams and hope come here to die. Aided and abetted by academics in these spaces who laud themselves as progressives but stay silent because of this or that or the other thing. The young lady in the video was on the Dean's merit list last year, so her hope has not died yet and my wish is that all her dreams come to fruition. But with each day that her dignity becomes eroded I don't see how that can remain possible. Strength and solidarity to her and to all the other students across this country.

My positionality

I will speak of my experiences and share observations from my positionality as a youth activist in Cape



Ms Jordan Pieters
Screen grab, Jaap Durand Chair video, UWC

Town existing within different activist spaces. I wanted to begin with a clip which formed part of a documentary I directed two years ago, called *Whose Democracy*.

This video was shot during a protest which CAYCO co-organised with a youth activist from Parkwood. The experience was many different things. How does one describe five-year olds protesting about the gang violence in their community? It was heartbreaking. It was inspiring. It was disturbing, perplexing, terrifying. It was profound and profane. We spent more time with the children after the protest.

The point that I want to reflect on is what occurred after this video was shot and after the protest, as it relates directly to many activist/leftist spaces in Cape Town and the classism which exists within it. What started as a protest against gangsterism culminated into the beginning of the end of CAYCO.

Up until that point we had been hopeful of and for the future. We were young people on a mission. Co-organising

large marches, staring down the police in front of the mid-term budget speech, storming the city hall. You'll note that all these daring things happened within the confines of the city bowl, as do most leftist events in Cape Town.

And so our bubble was quickly burst by the matter of *who* and *where* to organise. I and others felt invigorated by our experience with the children of Parkwood standing against gangsterism. This is what CAYCO meant to us. For those who are familiar with the CAYCO of the past, i.e. the Cape Youth Congress, this was the ethos which we wanted to bring back. This is where the young people of the city are. However, others felt as if resources could be better allocated. It was an ideological crisis. It was class warfare that happened within our little organisation. That was the beginning of the end.

People to be spoken about

I want to relate this experience to a broader problem within our city. Progressive spaces, when I say

progressive spaces within this context, I'm talking about what I call "big dog NGOs" who get R5 million+ funding every year. These spaces and the people in these spaces use our pain as statistics and weapons to batter politicians with but have never seen the inside of a township. Have never heard the sound of a gunshot. They think politics is about words to be spoken and not actions. And sadly, the reality is that these are the same people who are the ones speaking on the news, in radio interviews. These are the same people who write articles, who write journals, who exist in academic spaces.

It is important to reflect on who holds power in these conversations and how they wield that power. Needless to say it was downhill from there in terms of our organisation but I won't bore you with the rest.

However, It's not just young people. I remember attending a meeting in 2019. The big dog NGOs were present. I mentioned Gatvol Capetonians and said that I think progressive entities need to be seen and heard in our communities and not just when we send buses because we need bodies for a protest to parliament. We were just starting to hear about the movement.

I remember saying, we need to take our progressiveness and we need to go back to our communities. We need to be seen and heard in our townships. There's a gap and someone is going to come and fill that gap. There was scoffing and chuckling, Fadiel Adams was said to be an insignificant troublemaker. That same troublemaker now sits in Parliament and people are shocked and confused. My point isn't necessarily about his politics.

My point is that a lot of these people stereotype the Cape Flats. They stereotype the Cape Flats as just gangsters and the mothers of gangsters. They don't see our people with the ability to think politically, and people who could come to their own decisions. They do not speak to, only *for* people from the Cape Flats. Do not see them as people with political acumen. Now again, this wouldn't be important, but these are the same people who write articles, journals, appear on TV etc. The stereotyping of working class people on the Cape Flats is why little to no inroads have been made there since the 20th of August 1983 in Rocklands Civic Centre. We must look to community organisations from our communities to guide us, but we seldom ever do.

I've come here today with two humble requests.

Gangsters going North

The first is that we urgently look to the North. For the past five months, my work has taken me across the Northern Cape as well as the West Coast in the Western Cape. These places have an ancient beauty and the people speak a sing-song Afrikaans dialect that I have never heard before and which has gripped my heart. But the level of poverty and unemployment is breathtaking. Many of the young people that I've worked with in these communities have no dreams to speak of.

As Capetonians, I think we are engrossed in the struggles of our little colony. And for good reason. There's a lot going on here, but we are blind to the realities of those around us. In Lamberts Bay there are issues of food insecurity. How, you may ask, when their fisherman

catch large quantities of snoek? Well we need to have our fish and chips parcels on Fridays here, so all the snoek is sent to Cape Town and other places. The devastating forced removals under the Group Areas Act in Slippers Bay, Stompneusbaai, Klippiessdorp dwarfed by the story of District Six. It's important that in Cape Town, we look beyond ourselves.

I bring this up to draw attention to the fact that the ways in which gangsterism and gang violence have crept into these communities have caught the locals completely unaware and unprepared. A man who has been a fisherman his entire life, whose father and his father, and his father was a fisherman must now bury his son shot dead because of gangsters from Cape Town. In a *Daily Maverick* article, Diane Adams, the chair of Tabakbaai Neighbourhood Watch, said that most of the drug lords in Saldanha are from Cape Town (Cruywagen 2025).

Saldanha has become a sanctuary for gangsters from the city and elsewhere in the country. One of the alleged kingpins is said to work for an underworld figure from Cape Town. In the same article, Paulina Mali, said "I'm 72 years old and have for most of my life never heard a gunshot while residing in White City and now at the late stage of my life must start getting used to the rattling sounds of semi-automatic and automatic gunfire."

While conducting a workshop with young people from Diazville, also in Saldanha, one of the areas most affected by gun violence at this moment, they told me that at the same time that we were having our workshop, there was a funeral happening for one of their friends who was shot dead the previous week.

To the people in this room, with resources, with voices, with access. Please keep the West Coast in your remarks, in your thinking and in your hopes. We are not suffering alone.

A helpline for boys

My second request is in relation to functional and easily accessible resources for young boys from our communities caught in the cycle of gangsterism.

Through a friend who is a social worker, I heard a story of a young boy being threatened by a gang because he was refusing to join and was acting as if "he was better". His grandmother, his primary guardian, was in a state of panic and went to the police repeatedly but they said they couldn't do anything because he had not been physically harmed yet. Eventually he was.

Predictably he was beaten and only when he was bloodied and bruised with a broken arm, did the police contact a social worker who then placed him in a children's home in a different part of the city, where he now remains. I decided to write about it for a publication called *Fundza* whose audience is primarily between the ages of 16-24. I tried to end the article off with resources that boys in similar situations could use. A helpline maybe (Pieters, 2024).

While there were organisations in one or two communities who could offer assistance there was no general or regional such assistance to be found. I was shocked, appalled etc. We all know the cycle of gangsterism begins with the grooming of young boys, so where are the interventions, where is the support, the care? And if it does exist, why is it not accessible?

If those in the room with the might, and wherewithal could please urgently attend to this matter I would be extremely grateful. If not you, then who?

Organising the youth

I think I was asked to speak about youth organising in relation to gun violence? I don't have good news, truth be told. Young people in this city don't have the political conscientisation, the structures, organising capacity, the patience and mostly we don't have the resources.

Young people are still people within this fractured economy. Needing to work to pay rent, dealing with the high cost of living crisis. Struggling to get by. It just is the reality of the context they find themselves in. We are a hopeless generation living in a hopeless time. Young people are addicted and glued to phone screens with no concept of community.

I am part of an organisation called "The Umbrella Civic", representative of wards 57 and 115. We see in other wards how young people are not engaged. There are no young people coming to meetings; 60-year olds, they come; the 70-year olds with their gout, they come; but we are struggling to get young people to engage in civic spaces. A lot of older activists ask me, "What can we do?" Isay, "Are your children in civic spaces? Are

your children engaged in their community?"

Let's start in our own homes, let's start in our own streets and in our own communities. You can't expect some nameless young people to change our communities. It's up to the young people that you know.

Lastly, young people need to be given the space to lead. We have new ideas. That doesn't mean that old people must just go away. We need to work collectively across generations. I think the only way we can do that is if young people are actually given the space and are listened to.

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12

Beyond the state: Interfaith solidarity in the struggle against crime and gang violence

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Introduction

I regret that I am unable to join you in person, as I am currently on my annual teaching sabbatical at the University of Notre Dame in the United States. I remain grateful to the organisers for the opportunity to share my reflections via video on the pressing social crisis of gangsterism in the Western Cape.

In my contribution, I will focus specifically on the roles of community and faith-based organisations, and whether a community governance system

is possible. My reflections draw on sustained civil society and interfaith engagement on the Cape Flats, ongoing academic research, and the lived realities of communities confronting violence, inequality, and systemic neglect.

The roles of community and faith organisations

On the roles of community and faith organisations, I would like to share four salient points for our consideration, namely the religious reverence for human life, prophetic accountability and



Imam Prof A. Rashied Omar
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structural advocacy, moving beyond an obsession with the state, and keeping the lamp of hope alive.

The religious reverence for human life

As people of faith and conscience, we simply cannot remain indifferent to the senseless loss of life. The protection and preservation of human life stand among the highest moral objectives in Islam, and across other faith and wisdom traditions. A person of conscience is one who upholds the sanctity of life and reveres it in all its forms. This theological and ethical conviction carries concrete implications for persons of conscience and institutions of faith:

- We cannot normalise gang violence.
- We cannot remain silent in the face of gender-based violence or injustice.

- We cannot spiritualise suffering while ignoring its structural causes.

Faith must move us beyond ritual observance toward ethical responsibility and praxis. The first role of faith organisations is to call on community members to avoid these pitfalls of neglect.

Prophetic accountability and structural advocacy

Our communities must raise their voices with clarity and courage. A quiet but devastating low-intensity war is unfolding in our communities. Both local and national government have not been fully successful in curbing gang violence and to address its root causes.

In this context, community and faith organisations must:

- Call for decisive action against drug cartels and illegal arms networks.
- Advocate for strengthened social services and accessible youth recreation facilities.
- Promote skills development and sustainable job creation.
- Press for affordable social housing to confront overcrowding and spatial injustice.

This is not partisan politics; it is the work of moral accountability. A healthy religious sector of society will call out these structural injustices and equally denounce false spiritualities that reinforce the status quo.

Moving beyond an obsession with the state

While moral accountability requires us to speak truth to government, it also demands that we rethink our assumptions about where lasting change originates. For some time, I have argued that we must relinquish the illusion that enduring solutions to our social crises will come primarily from the state (see Omar 2002). We have developed an unhealthy fixation on the state as the sole agent of transformation. What is needed is a paradigm shift.

Durable social change is driven first and foremost by civil society. On the Cape Flats, vibrant community-based organisations already exist. The issue is not a lack of civic capacity, but whether we are all strengthening, coordinating, and sustaining it.

Faith communities as well as civil society are uniquely positioned to catalyse this shift. We are embedded in our neighbourhoods. We are not

parachuted into moments of crisis; we live within the very communities we seek to serve.

Keeping the lamp of hope alive

Beyond advocacy and institutional strengthening, faith communities are also called to nurture hope. We must recognise and celebrate the resilience within our communities. The people of the Cape Flats are not merely victims of violence; they are bearers of courage, creativity, and moral strength. Even in the face of trauma and violence, young people in the Cape Flats are rising with courage, creativity, and self-determination, as supported by their communities. These stories of perseverance and constructive action deserve to be amplified. Hope is not naïveté. It is disciplined resistance, an intentional refusal to surrender to despair.

Is a community governance system possible?

As to the question whether a community governance system is possible, my answer is "yes". Early expressions of such a governance system already exist in embryonic form within our communities. I would like to highlight four, namely active citizenry as democratic renewal, governance from below, healing as collective resistance and the emergence of a safety commons.

Active citizenry as democratic renewal

First, community governance begins with active citizenship. When residents

organise, protest, and sustain movements against gang violence, gender-based violence, spatial apartheid, and inequality, they are exercising democratic agency in its most vital form. If we channel our legitimate outrage into disciplined and sustained organising, we can move beyond protest toward genuine transformation.

Such collective action can also help mitigate vigilantism, which often arises from legitimate grievances within local communities when frustration and despair are expressed through violent means. One of the greatest challenges facing community and faith-based activists is how to promote and scale up active citizenship in an environment marked by apathy and hopelessness. Addressing this challenge requires sustained reflection, commitment, and long-term engagement.

Governance from below: street committees and coordination

Second, community governance is already visible in the everyday work of street committees and local networks. Neighbours form WhatsApp groups, share information in real time, escort children to school, organise community patrols, and often respond to crises more swiftly than formal policing structures. Through responsible leadership, we can channel community frustrations into constructive action and reduce the risk of vigilantism. This is governance from below, collective decision-making, accountability, and mutual care operating alongside, though not dependent upon, the state.

Healing as collective resistance

Third, healing must be understood as a political practice. Transmitted trauma on the Cape Flats is not only psychological; it is structural and intergenerational, rooted in colonialism, slavery, and apartheid. As such, meaningful healing must be collective and grounded in justice. Addressing it requires more than counselling and mentorship; it demands food security, employment pathways, safe schools, youth spaces, protection for women, and sustained dialogue. To pursue healing, both individual and collective, is to resist political systems that erode dignity and reproduce violence.

The emergence of a safety commons

Finally, from these practices emerges what may be called a Safety Commons, a system of community safety understood as a shared public good rather than privatised security or militarised control. It is built daily through patrols, youth programmes, community mapping, shared meals, shared grief, and shared organising.

Organisations such as the Bonteheuwel Development Forum, the Institute for Healing of Memories, the Women's Action Movement, and countless street committees are already nurturing this commons. It may be fragile and under-resourced, but it is real, and it is alive.

Conclusion

In closing, community and faith organisations are not peripheral to social transformation; they are central to it. Furthermore, community governance is

not a distant ideal; it is already emerging in lived practice. When we strengthen civil society, cultivate active citizenship, integrate healing into our organising, and nurture a Safety Commons rooted in mutual care, we take concrete steps toward a more just and dignified society.

The work before us is not to wait passively for the state, but to organise especially marginalised voices, to heal collectively, and to exercise shared ethical leadership within our communities.

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13

My experience in SAPS combating crime

Lindiwe Dyantyi

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I am the Subdistrict Commissioner of Nyanga Subdistrict, leading nine police stations. Five of those nine police stations have been labelled "gang stations" because they are bombarded by gang violence. Four police stations were labelled "murder stations" historically. I'm not proud to stand here and use this description because it describes the misery of our community. As a person working on the streets of this community, I treat these sentiments with sensitivity. I need to add, we must protect the integrity of our communities by not using the misery of our community for cheap popularity. You will understand why I say this. You get opportunists who are

grabbing the misery of our communities and use in a negative way.

My presentation will mostly cover the following question: "Is there a state and criminal justice design system failure?" If there is time, I will speak on the roles of the community and faith organisations, and lastly, on a community governance system possible?" I will address these questions based on my experience.

State and criminal justice design system failure?

On the first question: the answer is yes. It's a big yes, there is state and criminal justice design failure. We all know that. Most of the speakers, from the opening statements onwards stated



Brig Lindiwe Dyantyi
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that. My own view is that the state has failed dismally to deal with the root causes of community dysfunction.

What am I saying? Practically, I mean that the state has failed to address the influx of firearms and the drugs in our communities. I'm saying this, from my experience. Firearms, in my area of responsibility, has become the weapon of choice. People are being murdered and killed; mass killings are done through the use of firearms. Gangsters no longer use knives. That is why we focus on firearms and drugs.

Curbing the distribution of firearms and drugs has become the main purpose of our service. Another challenge is affording gang leaders business opportunities. The state will have to introduce legislation with strict restrictions on gangsters engaged in business opportunities.

These gang leaders have gained access to legitimate businesses. Their licenses

were gained through good processes but behind these they engage in criminal activities such as drugs distribution, and their members are recruited from poor families. We can't rely on the old legislation that are not addressing the current problem.

We need proper legislation to deal with this problem in our communities. We see how gang leaders manipulate our vulnerable communities. I'm thinking of their expressions of sympathy when people die. Is it real or is it a fake sympathy? Now, these gang leaders will pay for the funeral they caused, and they will gain more money from the insurance, meanwhile we are losing our kids.

The same happens with the extortion gangs in informal settlements, under-resourced areas. There is lack of support, especially for our youth. Our youth is vulnerable and they tend to join these gangs for they are trying to make a living. I'm not making excuses for them but the

state has contributed in confusing our kids. These under-resourced areas came about through environmental design. Our communities are being clustered in environments not conducive to healthy living, creating opportunities where our youth see no other choice but to join gangs. We are all trying hard to combat these ills but we are failing.

The high employment rate is a problem, as well as unequal education, particularly that of girls. These important matters are not immediately relevant to my address today.

We have under-resourcing at all levels, also within the sphere of the government. In the police service, for instance, there are shortages, leaving those who love the organisation to suffer. They are the ones who suffer trauma because the community expects more and more from them. These are the few members who have to deal with gangsterism.

The shrinkage of budget has another impact: we are not investing in updated technology.

There is prison system failure. It has not yet been mentioned, but the state is responsible for corrections. The prison is an entity of the state, and the criminals operate from inside. We have to restrict their opportunities to operate from within the prisons.

We cannot deny the fact that corruption plays a big role in our society, and it is hindering the services that we are supposed to render to the community. The community alleges that the police have sold them out. The police get the information from the community, and members share it with criminals, we hear. We cannot deny that. I'm not here to defend the South African Police Service.

But let's keep an open mind. The corruption involves us all, even members of the community members. They too are also corrupt. So, let us face reality.

Regarding the isolated strategies of the various stakeholders. We all have good strategies but we're working in silos. We need to find each other; combine and collaborate resources and deal and combat this thing. If we do that we will win this fight.

The roles of the community and faith organisations?

Let me be short, due to time constraints. Our communities can play a big role in combating corruption. I understand that they've lost trust in us, in the police. That's a fact. I don't underestimate the role of the community but in the same breath I must also plead with the community: stop outsourcing your own responsibilities to the police.

The police can't do certain things. I'm thinking of the parenting role. Kids, particularly small kids are supposed to be under your control. You can discipline them. Why are we neglecting them, why are they not in school? Why are they doing funny things and later graduate to join gangs? As communities we can do everything.

I don't underestimate the importance of faith organisations but I also recognise that there is unhealthy competition between various faith organisations that may influence the safety of our communities. What is the place of youth organisations in combating it gangsterism? Such organisations can play a role, and we, as police must support them, and invest in the youth.

Is the community governance system possible? Yes, other speakers have already spoken about community governance. I will not repeat their

comments, except to say that we have to stop scrambling our internal squabbling and put personal egos aside in this process of fighting crime.

SECTION E

Competing interests, assumptions, collaboration

The four presentations by Brig Mark Hartzenberg, David Abrahams, Fransina Lukas, and Prof Wessel le Roux converge on a central concern: the persistence of gangsterism in the Western Cape is not simply a policing problem, but a manifestation of deeper fragmentation across the state, civil society, and communities. Their contributions collectively illuminate four interrelated questions, competing interests, assumptions about “the other”, the persistence of silos, and the requirements for genuine collaboration, while offering distinct but overlapping frameworks for understanding and intervention.

Competing interests: Fragmentation as structural condition

All four presenters agree that the landscape of anti-gang interventions is defined by competing, yet individually legitimate, interests. Hartzenberg maps these most concretely across institutional actors. For the South African Police Service (SAPS), the

priority lies in public safety, risk management, and measurable crime reduction through arrests and convictions. Municipalities, by contrast, prioritise service delivery, compliance, and political accountability. Communities focus on lived experience, on whether they *feel* safe, while businesses seek economic stability. Civil society organisations, in turn, emphasise long-term social transformation rather than short-term enforcement gains.

Lukas reinforces this fragmentation by highlighting how these differing mandates translate into operational disjunctures. Law enforcement seeks stabilisation, government departments are constrained by policy and budgets, NGOs respond to immediate needs, and communities are driven by survival. The result is not simply disagreement, but systemic misalignment.

Abrahams deepens this analysis by situating competing interests within what he calls a Gramscian “organic crisis” of the post-apartheid state. Here, fragmentation is not accidental but

structural: a proliferation of political, social, and economic interests within communities themselves undermines unified action. The erosion of earlier forms of political “hegemony” has produced a plural but divided social field, within which gangs thrive as part of a broader “ecosystem”.

Le Roux adds a philosophical dimension by framing competing interests in terms of differing conceptions of the state itself. On one hand is the view of the state as a forceful enforcer, the “stronger gunman”. On the other is the constitutional-democratic state, which must justify its authority through legitimacy, rationality, and justice. These competing visions shape how stakeholders understand appropriate responses to gangsterism.

Assumptions about ‘the other’: Misrecognition and distrust

A second major theme across the presentations is the role of entrenched assumptions in perpetuating division. Hartzenberg is particularly explicit in cataloguing these mutual misperceptions. From the perspective of SAPS, municipalities are seen as disconnected from operational realities, NGOs as idealistic, communities as reactive rather than proactive, and businesses as self-interested. Conversely, SAPS is often perceived as resistant to change, unaccountable, militaristic, and indifferent to community voices.

Lukas echoes these dynamics, identifying three pervasive assumptions: that communities are unwilling to cooperate, that police do not care, and that government is unresponsive. She emphasises that these assumptions obscure more complex realities, fear within communities, resource constraints

within policing, and overstretched civil society organisations.

Abrahams pushes this further by suggesting that such assumptions are embedded within broader patterns of institutional behaviour. The illusion of collaboration, where actors “speak the right language” while retreating into silos, reflects not only misunderstanding but also self-interest, as organisations prioritise their own metrics, visibility, and survival.

Le Roux, from a philosophical standpoint, interrogates the deeper assumptions underlying “law and order” thinking. The tendency to equate law with force, and to view the state as fundamentally opposed to criminality, overlooks the historical reality that states themselves can act unjustly. This raises a critical question: when communities distrust the state, is this merely misperception, or does it reflect lived historical experience?

Across all four contributions, the most damaging shared assumption is identified by Hartzenberg: the belief that “the other does not care”. This misrecognition erodes the possibility of trust, even where commitment exists across all sectors.

Breaking through silos: From parallel action to integration

The persistence of silos emerges as both a practical and conceptual barrier. Hartzenberg identifies the tendency of stakeholders to retreat into institutional comfort zones, particularly when confronted with conflicting priorities and expectations. Collaboration, in this context, often becomes episodic and reactive rather than sustained and structured.

Lukas similarly critiques the fragmentation of efforts, noting

duplication in some areas and neglect in others due to poor coordination and communication. For her, breaking silos requires formalised structures, particularly through Community Police Forums (CPFs), that can convene diverse stakeholders into coherent platforms of engagement.

Abrahams offers the most radical critique of siloed thinking. He argues that existing approaches, whether state-led or community-based, have largely failed to impact the “gang ecosystem” because they operate in isolation. His concept of “articulated co-design” is explicitly aimed at overcoming this fragmentation. Rather than creating new strategies, Co-design seeks to integrate existing initiatives into a unified, coherent programme of action. This involves synthesis, analysis, integrated design, and coordinated implementation, all oriented toward measurable impact in specific localities.

Le Roux’s contribution to breaking silos lies in rethinking the role of the state itself. He cautions against both extremes: an over-reliance on coercive state power and a romantic retreat into community-based alternatives. Instead, he argues for a reconstituted democratic state that is both strong and fundamentally different from the “gunman”, a state that commands legitimacy through justification rather than force alone. This reframing is essential for bridging the divide between state and society.

What genuine collaboration requires: Conditions for possibility

All four presenters converge most strongly on the conditions required for genuine collaboration, though they articulate these in different registers.

Hartzenberg provides a practical framework, identifying key elements: clarity of mandates, shared objectives and timelines, a common language, structured platforms, consistent communication, trust, courage, and shared accountability. His emphasis is on moving collaboration from dialogue to coordinated action, underpinned by measurable outcomes.

Lukas complements this with a focus on relational and institutional transformation. She emphasises trust-building through consistent action, the formalisation of collaboration structures, improved communication, shared accountability, and the centrality of community-driven solutions. Importantly, she frames communities not as passive recipients but as active partners with indispensable knowledge.

Abrahams redefines collaboration altogether through the concept of co-design. For him, genuine collaboration is not about increased interaction but about *integration*. It requires a shift from competition to articulation, from parallel efforts to coordinated implementation, and from organisational autonomy to shared purpose. Crucially, Co-design insists on equality between state, civil society, and communities, and on a continuous process of adaptation and learning.

Le Roux situates these requirements within a broader normative framework. Genuine collaboration depends on restoring the legitimacy of the state through adherence to constitutional principles, rationality, reasonableness, and democratic accountability. Without this legitimacy, collaboration risks being undermined by distrust and resistance. At the same time, he underscores the necessity of addressing the socio-economic conditions that erode

democratic citizenship, suggesting that collaboration must extend beyond security interventions to include broader social transformation.

Conclusion: From fragmentation to shared purpose

Taken together, the four presentations present a sobering but constructive analysis. Competing interests, entrenched assumptions, and institutional silos are not incidental obstacles but defining features of the current landscape. Yet they also point toward a shared horizon: the possibility of a more integrated, trust-based, and accountable approach to safety.

What emerges most clearly is that collaboration cannot be reduced to coordination or consultation. It requires a fundamental reorientation of how actors understand their roles, their

relationships to one another, and the nature of the problem itself. It demands not only technical solutions but ethical and political transformation – of institutions, of communities, and of the state.

In this sense, genuine collaboration is both a practical necessity and a normative project. It requires, as Hartzenberg suggests, the courage to confront uncomfortable truths; as Lukas argues, the willingness to share power; as Abrahams insists, the commitment to integrated action; and as Le Roux reminds us, the reimagining of the state as a democratic institution grounded in justification rather than force.

Only through such a multidimensional approach can the cycle of fragmentation be broken and the conditions for safer communities be meaningfully realised.

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What genuine collaboration requires from us

Mark Hartzenberg

Brigadier
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Introduction

I'm Brigadier Mark Hartzenberg, the Acting District Commissioner, managing 63 stations in the City of Cape Town which includes the 26 or 31 of the identified "gang stations" and the nine historic "murders stations". I am also an ordained pastor in the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa. So, I have a dual role that I play; being a pastor gives me a better perspective on dealing with these matters going forward.

I was given the task to prepare on the clash of perspectives. We work in an environment where safety is not just a technical challenge, it's a deeply human one. It's something that touches the heart deeply. Every day we need it. We

navigate competing interests as police, the political pressures we face, community expectations that rises day by day, and the operational realities that are not always aligned with all these expectations. So when we talk about clashing perspectives, we're not speaking theoretically. We're speaking from lived experience.

Yet, despite these tensions, we share a common purpose for a safer city, a purpose for a safer province, a purpose for a future where our communities can trust the system as Brigadier Dyantyi rightfully mentioned in the system we're operating in. So, against this all, we have to operate and make things happen, not only for the community alone but also for

our side as well.

Today, I want to reflect honestly on where we disagree, regarding the assumptions we have about one another and what genuine collaboration would require from all of us.

Different perspectives

We will look at the perspectives from the viewpoints of the following stakeholders, that of the South African Police Service, and that of local government. In the City of Cape Town we have a cooperation agreement with the Western Cape government and the City of Cape Town, the municipality. We will look at the perspectives of civil society, that of the communities as well as a little bit of the business people.

There are different priorities and values which often lead to disagreement. We have the community whose priority is mainly individual freedom, while that of the police is that of accountability. They have prioritised individual freedom while us, as the South African Police Service, prioritise public safety and crime prevention. Individuals in the community focus on their individual freedom, we at the SAPS focus on the freedom of everyone.

That normally leads to tension and that normally leads to mistrust. *Dit is waar ons begin koppe stamp*. I'm very grateful for this opportunity where we can learn not to *stamp koppe maar om koppe saam te sit*, learning how to resolve matters.

What do we disagree on?

Let me start with the uncomfortable truth. We disagree on almost everything. But agree on the fact that people are dying and the community

needs us to do better. Yes, we disagree on roles and our mandates. The police believe municipalities expect SAPS to solve problems with enforcement tools. Municipalities on their side believe SAPS hide behind the mandate limitations instead of innovating. NGOs, CBOs feel both spheres of government underuse their expertise. They raise their voices, "We are here, we are here!, and you don't listen to us." Communities feel everyone is passing the buck.

We not only disagree on the roles of mandates, we also disagree on priorities, of what is important to us at any given time. The SAPS prioritise threat, we prioritise risk, and we prioritise crime patterns. I'd like to place the emphasis on *reported crime patterns*, not the dark figures that have been reported. We draw up our plans and priorities according to the crime pattern analysis that will normally not live up to the expectations of the community. They're saying, "You're at the wrong place at the wrong time. You should be here," while our stats give us another indication.

Municipalities on their side prioritise service delivery and political visibility. Communities on their side prioritise lived experience. They fear the trauma and daily survival what they're going through. Individual freedoms and police accountability are high on their radar, very high on their list of priorities. Business prioritise stability and economic continuity. Each of these priorities, my friends, is legitimate. The conflict arises because we rarely acknowledge that they are different indeed.

Somebody said, "We agree to disagree," and that does not normally happen.



Brig Mark Hartzenberg
Screen grab, Jaap Durand Chair video, UWC

We disagree on what success looks like. For the SAPS, arrests, convictions, and crime stats that drop, make us happy, that makes our heart goes boom, boom, boom. For municipalities the functioning of public spaces, compliance, and prevention are important.

For communities however, the safety that they can feel, is important, not the safety on a spreadsheet. What do I mean? I can present to the Community Police Forum and the communities that currently – I say this without shame – the crime stats indicate a total decrease in murders and attempted murders. If I had the authority, I would have shown you what the current status is. But people say, they don't feel it, because they will tell me, "Just yesterday three people were killed. I'm not listening to you that

there were 100 murders less than last year. What about the three that were just killed?" So, we have different priorities and importance we attach to each and the way we measure success.

For NGOs long-term social change and not good wins is how they measure success. We measure different things. So we celebrate different victories, and then we blame each other for the failures. To you, my victory will look like a failure, and your victory will look not as good as you're saying. Even when I come with a very nice green picture, you will still tell me. "I'm not celebrating with you because I don't feel safe. The moment I can send my child to the tuckshop and have the certainty that he will return back home without being hit by a stray bullet that is the time when I will start to feel safe again."

What assumptions do we hold of each other?

From the SAPS side we hold the assumption that the municipalities do not understand operational realities. The NGOs are idealistic and don't grasp enforcement constraints. "I cannot get to you. I do not have the means at this stage to service you." They don't understand that I'm here to provide a service, but you don't play the game with me. The communities only engage when they are angry. That is what we as the police perceive. Only when it touches you, then you come to the front. If it doesn't touch you, you on the back, you're at the back. That is what we perceive. The business sector only shows up when crime hits them and the economy is rock bottom. Then they start to make a noise.

What others often assume about the SAPS is that we are resistant to change, that we don't want accountability, and don't want to account, that we are militaristic and uninterested in our community's voices, that we are unwilling to cooperate. Some of these assumptions come from real experience.

I'm in my 40th year in the South African Police Service and I know what I talk about. I think I know, because it's not easy managing 63 stations. It's definitely not easy managing all the "gang stations" in the city, and Brigadier Dyantyi is managing the most difficult subdistrict of all the six subdistricts that I manage. We are always trying to do our best. I can say, it's not good for me to hear to see that somebody has been shot and we need to do better. That is what expected of us.

What are the assumptions that others hold about us? I mentioned it. The most damaging assumption is the belief that

the other side doesn't care. In my experience, that's almost never true because people care and people care deeply. They just care about different things in different ways, shaped by different pressures, but we do care.

What does collaboration require of us?

What are the key ingredients required for meaningful collaboration between government institutions, law enforcement, communities, and the private sector in building safer communities?

Number one is *clarity in mandate*. Effective collaboration begins when there's clear understanding who's responsible for what in the safety environment and who can contribute what to make this collaboration work.

Clear objectives and timelines. Partnership must move beyond just dialogue. It must focus on specific outcomes, whether it is reducing violent crime in a hotspot, improving the response times of the South African Police Service of whom it is said that they're always late or never come or supporting youth diversion programmes. Partners must agree on measurable goals and realistic timelines so that we can achieve proper and manageable collaboration.

In the collaboration stream, we should all also have a *shared language*. Different sectors use different terminology and operate within different institutional cultures. Collaboration requires a shared understanding of concepts, of priorities, of strategies and all these partners that are working together must have the same frame of mind from which we all work from.

Number four is *predictable platforms*. Collaboration cannot be on an *ad hoc* basis. It requires a structurable and predictable platform where safety forums, joint operational committees, community policing structures where stakeholders meet, share information and coordinate interventions.

Consistent and clear communication. This is a very important thing. Transparent communication ensures that partners remain aligned and communication remain *open*. This includes sharing crime trends – sometimes a bit difficult – operational priorities and give progress on updates from every organisation, from every sphere, from everyone involved.

Collaboration asked for *courage and care*. Building partnership required courage to engage honestly about difficult challenges including institutional weaknesses or community frustrations. At the same time it requires care and respect for the perspective that each one around the table hold.

Collaboration ask for *trust*. Trust is the foundation of collaboration. Communities must trust law enforcement. An institution must trust their partners. Trust is built through consistent delivery, transparency and accountability. We need to be open with each other.

Number eight is shared *accountability*. Finally, collaboration means recognition that safety is a shared responsibility. Government alone cannot solve complex safety challenges. Business, civil society

and organisations, neighbourhood structures and individual citizens all have to play a role in creating a safe and secure environment for all of us to live in.

When these elements are present, collaboration moves from being a discussion platform to being a powerful mechanism where coordinated action and measured safety and measurable safety improvements can be met and achieved.

Conclusion

When perspectives clash, we have two options, two choices. One, we can retreat into our silos, we can defend ourselves or we can continue blaming one another, or we have a second choice. We can lean into the discomfort of our assumptions and build something stronger than any one institution can achieve alone. In the Western Cape, in the City of Cape Town, we don't have the luxury of choosing the first option.

Our communities deserve the second choice. Our communities deserve to get out of our comfort zones, talk about the things that are uncomfortable, talk about the difficulties, talk about the challenges. Don't attack the problem, attack the issue. When we achieve that our communities will be safer outside.

This is my vision and my prerogative to try our best while I'm in the seat so that the children once again can go to the tuckshop and that we are sure that they will return safely.

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The perspectives of the Cape Crime Crisis Coalition

David Abrahams

General Secretary
Cape Crime Crisis Coalition, Cape Town

Introduction

If we were in a mass meeting here at the University of the Western Cape back in the early 80s, one of the concepts the students would have been speaking about would have been Gramsci's notion of an "organic crisis". We said in 1982 that the apartheid state was in the throes of an organic crisis. It was an organic crisis of its own doing affecting all elements of society. Isn't it ironic that 44 years later we're sitting here at UWC talking again about a crisis, an organic crisis? When the Cape Crime Crisis Coalition (C4) was formed, one of the things that we spoke about was the state of crisis. The coalition was formed during

the 2023 taxi blockade when we intervened to bring it to successful conclusion. We did so because the public transport crisis was to the detriment of the working class communities of the Cape Flats and beyond. As our name suggests, C4's understanding of the state of crisis extends far beyond any specific manifestation. We drew the conclusion that the post-apartheid state – our state – is in the throes of an organic crisis. It's an organic crisis largely of its own doing. There are political leaders – whom we won't name today – who would like us to believe that the crisis comes from without but we know differently, don't we?

Today, I'm going to be talking about



Mr David Abrahams
Screen grab, Jaap Durand Chair video, UWC

the perspectives of the Cape Crime Crisis Coalition on the following questions, “What are the competing interests?, What assumptions do we hold about ‘the other’, How does one break through the silos?, and What would collaboration actually require?”

As General Secretaries we talk on behalf of our organisations and that is what I will do. I'm going to link it to what Brigadier Hartzenberg has said. We should take note of his excellent input and it will shape much of what I will say. I had to change my input because a lot of what he said, is of fundamental importance in relation to what we're trying to do as C4.

We have this organic crisis and see its manifestations every day. One of the most visceral manifestations of this crisis is crime, gangsterism and thuggery in our country. It's a crisis because it's not just a

crisis of criminality of gangs. It's a criminality at all levels of a society. It's a criminality that has penetrated the entire state.

For example, the thing that frightens me about the Madlanga Commission is not what is being exposed about SAPS, it's the realisation that the crisis of endemic corruption is in all the departments across government, not only in national departments but also in provincial departments in all nine provinces. There is no province or no state structure that can claim immunity from corruption.

This organic crisis affects all levels of government but its most visceral manifestation is crime and gangsterism. Gangsterism is what our communities face every day of their lives. Of course it's not new, as Jeremy Vearey pointed out, the origins of the *Nommer* goes back

more than 100 years. The people of the Cape Flats have lived with gangsterism their entire lives. Our communities are crying, "What are you doing about this? How are you addressing the fact that every day our children are being killed, every day our communities are under siege, what are you doing?" We can't tell them that we're having workshops, seminars and discussions because that's not what our communities are interested in. At the same time, these kinds of discussions are important because it gives us an opportunity to understand what it is that we're doing in a way that we didn't understand before.

The gang ecosystem

This morning when Vearey spoke what he said very accurately reflects what C4 understands by what constitutes a gang in 2026. I don't think anybody in this country, outside of former gangsters, understands gangsterism in the way that he does. Jeremy is a valuable member of C4 and the perspectives he's brought on the issue made us completely rethink the way we understand gangsterism. The same goes for Irvin Kinnes – a C4 thought leader who is unmatched in the national academic criminology community for how he combines academic excellence with on the ground activism and experience going back almost 40 years.

In listening to all the speakers that have spoken before me, Dr Craven Engel is the only speaker that has referred to a "gang ecosystem". This is critical because that's exactly what we're dealing with here. We're not dealing with individual gangs. We're dealing with an ecosystem, a gang ecosystem. And the challenge that we have, is about how do we put together

strategies that pushes back that gang ecosystem. It's about those mothers who know their children are gangsters and who protect them. It's about Brig Dyantyi's officers who are going into Valhalla Park and are being attacked by community members. That's part of this gang ecosystem. It's this ecosystem that protects and nurtures the gangs. We have to find a way of pushing back that ecosystem.

It's not easy because it requires us to think about these things in a way that we've never talked about. Sometimes it's really difficult and sometimes it's much easier to go into our little silos and do our own things there and pretend what we're doing matters. Maybe in the little groups it does matter but if in the bigger scheme of things it has no impact on the gangs. We need to ask hard questions about what are we doing and why are we doing it?

A proliferation of interests

There's a lot of things that C4 wants to bring into this discussion that's uncomfortable in forcing us to think through things in a very different way. As a civil society based coalition one of the fundamental things we have to come to terms with is that since 1994 the social economic practice in the Western Cape has largely remained the same, while the political situation at the local level has changed completely. When we were activists in the 1980s we used another of Gramsci's terms, namely "hegemony". As anti-apartheid activists we were hegemonic in communities. There was nobody to challenge us; we could go into communities and do our thing there, apart from the apartheid forces there was nobody to challenge us.



THE SANDF BRINGS RIFLES. A STATE OF DISASTER BRINGS BUDGETS

13 February 2026: The Cape Crime Crisis Coalition (C4) rejects the rationale for the deployment of the SANDF to combat gangs and gang-related crime and violence on the Cape Flats and in Gauteng. The deployment of the army is not a solution; it is a surrender.

President Ramaphosa's SONA 2026 announcement to bring in the SANDF is an unequivocal admission that the state has lost the strategic initiative to deliver public safety. When a government calls in the army to perform civilian policing, it confesses that its police leadership is broken, its political oversight has failed, and its reserves of competent governance are exhausted.

We have been here before and the evidence shows that it does not work. In 2019, Operation Prosper was launched with great fanfare in Mitchell's Plain, Nyanga, and across the Cape Flats. Cameras rolled. Politicians posed. Soldiers patrolled. Six months later, the army returned to barracks.

In a 2020 evaluation of Operation Prosper examining the role and impact of the SANDF, including its impact on the murder rate the findings show:

"That there does appear to have been a reduction in murders in the month when the deployment started but found no evidence that the army presence significantly reduced murders in the affected communities over the deployment period, as compared with similar ones where the army was absent."¹

What did happen is that gangs returned to terrorising our communities. Over the last year the level of killings has escalated, with mass shootings a regular occurrence - entire groups of people slaughtered in a single event. The army's temporary presence did not disrupt the gang economy; it merely paused the count. For communities under sustained siege, calling for the deployment of the army is understandable in the face of a state that has retreated and failed in its constitutional duty to protect its people. But it is not a solution.

Today's gangs are highly organised criminal syndicates. Dealing with organised crime requires an organised and highly efficient police service with experienced detectives. This

¹ Cano, I., Krieger, A., Scott, D., & Sabela Ntshekisa, Z. (2024). "Soldiers against gangsters?": Evaluation of the impact of the army deployment against gang violence on homicides in the Cape Flats. *South African Crime Quarterly*, 72, 1-1 to 1. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2413-3108/2023/vn72a13810>

ecosystem. If we don't succeed we will fail and the gang ecosystem will proliferate and grow even stronger. In fact, it's not simply about pushing back against the gang ecosystem – it's about putting in place alternative ecosystems. We have to do that because we can no longer leave that in the hands of the state and the political leaders we have. We did that in the post-1994 period and see where it has brought us. If we continue to hand over our power to the state we will never be able to make inroads to build the new civil society based governance framework Vearey referred

Of what relevance is this observation in relation to fighting crime and in particular pushing back the gang ecosystem? Well it's because 1994 changed everything at a political level in this Province. While the economic social and other aspects of our reality has largely stayed the same and in fact got worse, we now have a situation within communities where there's a proliferation of political parties and interests. And for C4 the challenge is that we need to find a way of bringing all of that together around a common objective. We need to unite the broadest range of community interests around a common objective of pushing back against crime and the gang

to this morning.

That's incredibly difficult but we need to do that. For some of us it's really difficult to do that because often we're stuck in the way we dealt with things in the 1980s. We tend not to think about what is important for our communities but how it helps us with our own positioning strategies at the local level. We need to change that. We need to be thinking about these things in a very different way. That's a challenge that C4 is prepared to take on because that's the kind of hard conversations that we need to have if we're going to move forward, if we're going to be able to push back these gang ecosystems. So that's the first thing.

Constructing alternative ecosystems

The second thing that's critically important is how do we construct these alternative ecosystems? If we want to destroy the gang ecosystems we also have to put in place alternative ecosystems at the local level. I'm not saying nothing is happening. Not at all, you've heard of many initiatives and there are many things happening. People are sacrificing their blood, their sweat, their time to do things, but there's a fundamental problem at that level. The problem is that we're doing a lot of things, but we're not seeming to be making any progress because it would appear that the gang problem is getting worse. The gang ecosystem is consolidating itself. So, there must be something that we're doing wrong in all the things that we do every day. There must be something that we're doing wrong. We need to find out what that is and we need to address that.

In his opening remarks to this session Rev Dr Llewellyn MacMaster, our C4 chairperson asked the question of how we measure the impact in all that we are doing? If you follow his public statements you will hear that the issue of impact is a theme he constantly refers to, because making an impact is at the heart

is something the army cannot do. Gangs and organised crime are embedded social institutions. They are not weakened by these deployments. They adapt. They consolidate. They watch the state cycle through the same performative gestures—soldiers, cordons, press conferences—and understand that the underlying machinery remains broken.

THE C4 ALTERNATIVE: DECLARE A PROVINCIAL STATE OF DISASTER

We call on the President and the Provincial Government to **declare a Provincial State of Disaster** in the Western Cape, in terms of the Disaster Management Act, 2002. Doing so will unlock resources, enable intergovernmental coordination, and address some of the root causes of gang violence. It is subject to parliamentary oversight, provincial legislative scrutiny, and judicial review. It does not erode the constitutional order; it activates it.

A State of Disaster compels **all spheres of government**—national, provincial, local—to work under a single, integrated command and control structure. It permits the redirecting of national funds to provincial and local levels, allowing rapid procurement of resources for housing, health, education, and social development—the very conditions in which gangs flourish. Gangsterism is not a military problem: It is a social, economic, and developmental crisis expressing itself through violence. A State of Disaster permits the declaration of a **social compact**—binding government, business, labour, and civil society to a sustained, multi-year programme of intervention. It therefore empowers communities to act rather than occupying them. It mandates the inclusion of Community Police Forums, neighbourhood watches, and civil society organisations in planning and oversight.

THE CHOICE BEFORE US

We are being presented with a false dichotomy: that the only choice is between soldiers and surrender. This is false. You cannot patrol your way out of organised crime. There is a third path—one that does not treat the Cape Flats as a war zone, but as a disaster area deserving of the same urgency and resources we extend to communities struck by flood, fire, or pandemic. The people of the Cape Flats do not need soldiers. They need a state that treats their lives as seriously as it treats a flood.

The people of this province deserve better than soldiers. They deserve public safety. Security theatre is not safety. And they people have been waiting decades for the state to deliver it.

ENDS

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For interviews contact:

of the C4 philosophy. I need to remind you that C4 is not an organisation or an NGO; we are a community and civil society based social movement coalition. We exist because of that others do on the ground, in communities, in the myriad of anti-crime and anti-gangsterism interventions and programmes that exist. We also do not claim any of these as our own. What we do however, is to find ways to think differently about what we do, because, the truth is, so much of what we do simply does not have an impact where it matters the most – on the gang ecosystem.

This applies as much to the state as it applies to the many community based and civil society based initiatives. The

truth is, if what we do has no impact on the gang ecosystem, why do we continue to do it? If the gang ecosystem can thrive and proliferate in the way it does despite all our efforts, why do we continue to do things in the same way and hope for different results and outcomes?

So, that brings me to the issue of collaboration, expanded upon earlier by Brigadier Hartzenberg. C4 has no issue with what he says, in fact we hold him, Brig Dyantyi and other SAPS officers who are trying to do things differently in the highest esteem. It is all very well talking about collaboration. But you know what often collaboration means? Too often it means talking the right language while retreating into our silos and comfort zones. It means creating the impression of working together while we pursue our clean audits and organisational and personal KPIs. So we set up structures, forums and a myriad of processes that creates the impression of collaboration, consultation and the like and we pretend that we are doing things differently to what we have become so familiar with over the last 30 years. But, are we doing things differently?

How can we be doing things differently if the way we measure impact and success is still largely based on numbers? The number of imbizos, we have, the numbers of arrests, the number of attendees at a march, or protest, the number of youth that pitches up at a sports-based anti-crime event? I can go on with many more examples but I think you get the point.

So, what hasn't changed is that often the way we still understand collaboration is by counting the number of meetings we have, instead of five meetings a week, we're going to have eight meetings in a week. We measure our productivity by

how many meetings we're attending. Maybe we need to be looking at a different way of measuring what this collaboration means.

A process of co-design

There are two things that C4 wants to put to you. The first is we invite you to join us, together with SAPS and all the different stakeholders, around a process of co-design. C4 is working closely with these brigadiers and many other SAPS leaders in an exciting process of real collaboration we call "co-design". In his talk Hartzenberg has pointed out that the focus of the co-design process is that elaboration, design and implementation of comprehensive and measurable anti-gang ecosystem interventions in the top 26 gang station area across the Cape Flats and beyond. Let me just briefly say what co-design is and what it isn't. In this you will notice there is much in common with what the brigadiers said in their respective inputs.

We are sensitive to possible misunderstanding. The misunderstanding may exist that for C4 co-design entails scrapping all existing anti-gang strategies, policies, and programmes currently in operation, and that would mean starting from a blank slate, discarding years of work, and developing an entirely new strategy from scratch. This is incorrect. This is not what co-design means, and this is not what C4 is proposing.

Such an approach would be not only impractical but deeply disrespectful to the countless individuals and organisations who have invested years of effort in developing and implementing anti-gang interventions across the Western Cape. It would ignore the hard-won lessons, the relationships built, and

the made, however insufficient that progress may have been. It would also delay any meaningful action while we waited for a completely new framework to emerge from drawn-out consultation processes.

What Co-design means: A definition

Co-design is not about starting from scratch. It is not about discarding the years of work, the hard-won lessons, and the countless strategies that have been developed to combat gang violence on the Cape Flats. It is not about yet another document that will gather dust on a shelf while communities continue to bury their children.

Co-design is the process of bringing together everything that already exists – all the strategies, all the programmes, all the interventions, all the knowledge, all the relationships – and weaving them into a single, coherent, and aligned programme of action that moves from collaboration to articulation. And in introducing the notion of “articulation” is how C4 proposes that we move away from the old ideas around collaboration.

Articulated Co-design: A new way of collaboration

The starting point of articulated co-design is the acceptance that every existing anti-gang strategy, policy, and programme is valid and has a place in the Co-design process. Each represents a genuine effort to address the crisis. Each contains valuable insights. Each has constituencies committed to its implementation. Each holds pieces of the puzzle. The question co-design asks is

Co-design means	
☒	<i>A process of bringing together everything that already exists – all existing strategies, programmes, interventions, knowledge, and relationships – and weaving them into a single, coherent, articulated process of conception, design, implementation and review.</i>
☒	<i>Starting from acceptance</i> that every existing anti-gang strategy, policy, and programme is <i>valid</i> – not perfect, but valuable. Each contains insights and has people committed to it.
☒	<i>Asking the question:</i> “What are we already doing, and how can we do it together?” – not “What new strategy should we invent?”
☒	<i>Inclusive, collaborative, iterative, action-oriented, respectful, adaptive, and accountable.</i>
☒	<i>A shift from endless strategy development to articulated implementation; from working in parallel to working in partnership; from competition to articulation.</i>
☒	<i>Equal partnership</i> between state and communities and civil society – each brings indispensable elements that the other lacks.
☒	<i>Structural articulation</i> – designing interventions so they are connected at specific, systematic points (information flows, resource alignment, shared accountability).

Table 1: What Co-design means

not “What new strategy should we invent?” but rather: “What are we already doing, and how can we do it together?”

This seemingly simple question has profound implications. It shifts the focus from endless strategy development to coordinated implementation. It moves partners from working in parallel to working in partnership. It replaces competition with articulation collaboration, fragmentation with integration, and isolation with common objectives and outcomes.

The Co-design process as outlined by Prof Nicolette Roman of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies of Children, Families and Society at UWC, follows four steps:

- *Synthesis:* Gather and synthesise all existing strategies, policies, and programmes.

What co-design is not	
✗	<i>A rejection of existing work.</i> It does not discard years of effort. It amplifies what already exists.
✗	<i>A blank slate process.</i> We do not start from zero. We start from decades of experience, failure, learning, and partial success.
✗	<i>A delay tactic.</i> It is not an excuse to keep talking. It is a mechanism to make action more effective by ensuring we act together.
✗	<i>A power grab.</i> Co-design does not centralise control or take away anyone's mandate. It shares power while respecting distinct roles.
✗	<i>A one-time event.</i> It is not a workshop that produces a document that gathers dust. It is an ongoing process of alignment, coordination, and adaptation.
✗	<i>A talking shop.</i> It is a design studio for action – focused on implementation, not just discussion.
✗	<i>Government-driven.</i> Co-design is a partnership. No single sector dominates. Communities, civil society, and the state are equal co-creators.

Table 2: What Co-design is not

- *Analysis:* Identify common objectives, overlaps, gaps, and opportunities for integration.
- *Integrated design:* Redesign existing interventions to function as a coherent whole.
- *Articulated implementation:* Put the articulated design into practice in the 26 gang station areas, with shared accountability and continuous adaptation. Throughout this process, the goal remains constant: to ensure that all the wheels are turning in the same direction, at the same speed, toward the same destination. This is what Co-design means. This is what C4 is committed to. And this is what our communities deserve.

So, Co-design does the following: It is a process of bringing together everything that already exists; starting from acceptance that every existing anti-gang strategy, policy, and programme is valid, while asking the

question: “What are we already doing, and how can we do it together?”

It is inclusive, collaborative, iterative, action-oriented, respectful, adaptive, and accountable, and shifts from endless strategy development to articulated implementation; from working in parallel to working in partnership.

Co-design presupposes an equal partnership between state and communities and civil society involving structural articulation (see Table 1). What Co-design is not a rejection of existing work, neither is it a blank slate process, or is it a delay tactic. Co-design is not a power grab, a one-time event, or a talking shop. It is a partnership and not

government- driven (see Table 2).

Therefore, co-design looks at collaboration in a very different way. Co-design says what we need to focus on are those 26 gang stations that the brigadier spoke about. What would real integrated collaboration against gangsterism and criminality within each of those 26 gang stations look like? That's what we're working towards, and that requires us to think about collaboration in radically different ways. We need to rethink a lot of those assumptions that you're talking about because those assumptions often hold us back.

So, I want to invite you in whatever space you are to work around this co-design process because it isn't about fancy discussion. It's about putting together interventions at a local level based on information based on working together to push back the gang ecosystem, putting together real interventions that matter.

C4 does not claim to represent communities. We are a coalition of organisations; we're not claiming to represent anybody but ourselves. We want to bring everybody together and if we succeed in doing that, that's fine. If we don't, then we learn from our mistakes and go forward from there.

The army in the townships

The last thing that I want to talk about as part of this process is the introduction of the army. On the 1st of April the army is going to come. At C4 we have a very strong position on that. We've put out a two-page document on what we understand by the implications of the army in the townships. It's a reality that's going to happen. We need to find a way to respond to the army in our local communities. How do we prepare for that? Our response is not that of wanting to fight against the deployment. Neither is it to engage in endless and rather

pointless discussions about the merits and demerits of the deployment. The SANDF is our army, they're our army. In the same way that SAPS is our police force.

The focus of C4, as spelt out in great exhaustive detail in our 33 page Briefing Document to communities most likely to be impacted by the deployment is How do we work together so that we make sure that the mistakes of 2019 are not repeated? So that when the army leaves 12 months and R800 million later there would be a real drop in criminality, and the impact on the gang ecosystems will be real and measurable beyond the numbers. We want to invite you to be part of that engagement process at that local level because all of us have to be part of this process. None of us must leave ourselves out and none of us must distance ourselves. We all have a responsibility to make sure that we succeed in pushing back the gang ecosystem.

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Towards strengthening partnerships

Fransina Lukas

Chairperson
National Community Police Boards

I stand before you not only as the Provincial Community Police Forum Chairperson in the Western Cape, but as someone who has witnessed, first-hand, both the strength of our communities and the deep fractures that continue to undermine our collective efforts to combat crime and gangsterism.

My presentation is guided by these critical and uncomfortable questions: What are the competing interests between the community and the police? What assumptions do we hold about "the other" and perhaps most importantly — what does real collaboration require?

Let me begin by saying this: collaboration is a word we use often, but in practice, it remains one of our greatest failures. In many of our communities,

there is still a divide. A divide between the police and the community. A divide between government and civil society. A divide even among community structures themselves. And unless we confront these divides honestly, we will continue to work in silos, duplicating efforts, wasting resources, and ultimately failing the very people we are meant to serve.

One of the biggest challenges we face is "competing interests". Different stakeholders come to the table with different mandates, priorities, and pressures. Law enforcement is focused on stabilisation and crime reduction. Government departments are guided by policy and budget constraints. Non-governmental organisations and



Mrs Fransina Lukas
Screen grab, Jaap Durand Chair video, UWC

community organisations are driven by immediate needs on the ground. And communities themselves are driven by survival. None of these interests are wrong, but when they are not aligned. They create fragmentation.

As Community Police Forums (CPFs), we are often caught in the middle of these competing interests. We hear the frustrations of the community when there is no visible policing. We hear the frustrations of South African Police Service (SAPS) when there is a lack of cooperation. And we see the gaps where services should exist but do not.

This brings me to the second issue, "assumptions".

We must be honest about the assumptions we carry. There is an assumption that

- do not want to cooperate with the police.

- do not care about communities.
- government is not responsive.

And sometimes, there is even an assumption that community structures are ineffective.

But the reality is far more complex. Communities are often afraid, afraid of retaliation, afraid of being exposed, afraid because they do not trust that the system will protect them.

Police officers are often overwhelmed, working in under-resourced circumstances, under pressure, and in dangerous conditions. Community organisations are often underfunded and overstretched. If we do not challenge these assumptions, we build barriers instead of bridges.

So, the question becomes: "How do we break through these silos?"

Firstly, we must rebuild "trust".

Trust is not created through meetings alone. It is built through consistent action, visibility, and accountability. Communities need to see that when they speak, they are heard. And when they partner, they are respected.

Secondly, we need "structured collaboration". Collaboration cannot be *ad hoc*. It cannot depend on personalities or goodwill alone. It must be formalised, with clear roles, responsibilities, and accountability mechanisms. As CPFs, we must strengthen our role as conveners, bringing together SAPS, local government, non-governmental organisations, faith-based organisations, and community leaders into one coordinated platform.

Thirdly, we must improve "communication". Too often, information is not shared effectively. Communities do not know what interventions are in place. Stakeholders are not aware of each other's work. This leads to duplication in some areas and complete neglect in others. We need transparent, regular communication channels at local level, where information flows both ways.

Fourthly, we must commit to "shared accountability". Safety is not the responsibility of SAPS alone. It is not the responsibility of government alone. It is a shared responsibility. We must move away from a culture of blame and towards a culture of joint ownership. When we succeed, we succeed together. And when we fail, we must also take collective responsibility.

Fifthly, and most importantly, we must invest in "community-driven solutions".

Communities are not just beneficiaries, they are partners. They understand the dynamics on the ground. They know where the problems are. And often, they already have solutions.

Our role as CPFs is to support, empower, and resource these solutions, not to override them.

If we are serious about collaboration, then we must be prepared to change how we work. We must be prepared to:

- Listen more than we speak
- Share power, not hold onto it
- Break down institutional barriers

And commit to long-term partnerships, not short-term interventions. As the Provincial CPF, we commit ourselves to strengthening these partnerships across the Western Cape. We commit to building stronger, more functional CPFs that truly represent and serve their communities. And we commit to working with all stakeholders to ensure that collaboration becomes a lived reality, not just a discussion point.

Let me end with this:

- We cannot police our way out of gangsterism.
- We cannot govern our way out of it alone.
- And communities cannot fight it in isolation.

But together, through genuine, structured, and accountable collaboration, we stand a real chance of making a difference.

17

Do we need a stronger or a different kind of state in response to gangsterism in the Western Cape?

Wessel le Roux

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I Speaking as an academic and legal philosopher, the problem of gangsterism in the Western Cape raises some pertinent questions about the nature of the modern state and the law. This proposition might sound strange at first. Is widespread gangsterism not the opposite of the law? A sign of both a total violation of the law, on the one hand, and a total breakdown in effective law enforcement, on the other? How can gangsterism teach us anything about the essence of the state and the law beyond this reality? This question might also

sound unnecessarily abstract and intellectual – too far removed from the tears shared by victims during and after previous presentations. It is precisely because law remains haunted by those stories that it is important for legal philosophers to ask what assumptions we hold about the law and the state when we speak about “law and order” responses to gangsterism and gang violence. The question boils down to this: do we need a stronger or a different kind of state in response to gangsterism in the Western Cape?



Prof Wessel le Roux
Screen grab, Jaap Durand Chair video, UWC

2 There is no doubt that we need a stronger state, better equipped with technology and intelligence capabilities, and better able to effectively enforce the law. Our idea of a stronger state is no doubt informed by a sharp contrast between the state (and its laws) and the gang (and its lawlessness) as direct opposites. During an armed robbery, or what is known in European legal philosophy as a “gunman situation”, the robbers are clearly breaking the law. The robbers control a monopoly of force in the situation and order somebody to do something (“hand over the money”) backed by a threat (“or we will shoot”). This is on the face of it the very opposite of what the law requires and how the law operates. If the police (or army) arrives on the scene in time, they will control the monopoly of force, and the gunmen will

be arrested, prosecuted, convicted and punished.

3 However, when we look at the history of the legal philosophy we inherited from Europe, something interesting appears. Key legal philosophers have looked at gunmen and the gunman situation, not as the opposite of the law, but as the point of view that must be adopted if we are to understand, not the nature of crime, but the essence of the state and the law itself. Starting in the 19th century, these philosophers have turned to gangsterism and the gunman situation as an *analogy* for what the law of the state, especially criminal law, is really about.

4 One provocative example of this line of thinking is provided by the work of a legal philosopher from the United

States, and later a judge, called Oliver Wendell Holmes. At a dinner party in 1897, Holmes famously urged students to change their moralistic pretensions about the law:

If you want to know the law and nothing else, you must look at it as a bad man, who cares only for the material consequences which such knowledge enables him to predict, not as a good one, who finds his reasons for conduct, whether inside the law or outside of it, in the vaguer sanctions of conscience. [...] If we take the view of our friend the bad man, we shall find that he does not care two straws for the axioms or deductions [of law from morality and religion], but that he does want to know what the Massachusetts or English courts are likely to do in fact. I am much of this mind. *The prophecies of what the courts will do in fact, and nothing more pretentious, are what I mean by the law*" (Holmes 1897).

Holmes lived at the end of the 19th century and insisted that in modern societies, law must be sharply distinguished from religion and morality, otherwise law will be unable to respond to the social demands of industrialisation. In place of the older moral theories of law, also known to legal philosopher as *natural law* theories, Holmes suggested a "prediction" theory of law and the perspective of the so-called bad man as the starting point for the scientific study of modern law. The validity of law no longer depended on its religious or moral pedigree and content but simply on what court were actually doing and deciding. was actually happening in the courts. Holmes therefore urged lawyers to stop writing moral-legal treaties (what is called the "law in the books") and to

study how and why courts decide cases and legislatures make laws (the so-called "law in action"). This demystification of the law was an essential precondition for effective social reform. This perspective is known as *legal positivism*.

5 Holmes was not the first 19th century European to call for a positivist understanding of law (as opposed to the old moralist or natural law understanding). Some decades before Holmes's famous speech, John Austin, a famous English legal philosopher of the time, equally insisted on a sharp distinction between law and morality. The difference, he suggested, was that religion and morality are not enforced by the police but the law is. We can speculate about what is morally good or bad but we can know, as a fact, what is legally right and wrong by observing, much as Holmes's bad man does, which laws are actually enforced by the state. As a result, Austin defined the law as a series of commands from a sovereign (a person who is habitually obeyed) to a subject, backed by a threat of punishment for disobedience (see Austin, 1995). This became known as the "command theory of law". You can see the similarity with the gunman situation. The sovereign state is like a gunman. The state gives commands to its subjects, backed by a threat of violence and punishes disobedience. The only difference between the gunman and the state is the person who holds the gun. Where law applies and is enforced, the guns are in the hands of the police; in gangland, the guns are in the hands of Holmes's bad men.

6 We can call this the “inverted gunman situation”. The strong state is a more powerful gunman. This is how many people tasked to respond to gangsterism seemingly see the state and the law. General Rudzani Maphwanya reportedly said recently that the reason the army will be deployed to gang areas in the Western Cape and elsewhere, is to restore the state’s “monopoly of force” on the ground, that is, to get the guns in the right hands or to enforce the laws (commands) of the state (Metelerkamp, 2026). This idea of the strong state and its laws as commands backed by threats (the command theory of law) is clearly a wide-spread and popular conception of the state and its law. The idea that the state is able to restore its monopoly of force as the strongest gun man on the block might well be a comforting thought and a necessary step in the fight against organised crime.

7 There is a problem with the positivist view of the state and its laws. While the force of the state can be used to do good things, for example to end gang violence and to bring justice to all the victims of gangsterism, the state can and has also used its guns to do bad things. The problem is that positivists, such as Holmes and Austin, make it very hard if not impossible to tell the difference. Both the German state during the Nazi era and the South African state during apartheid made and enforced laws which seemed to undermine the very idea of law, but which were harshly enforced and would certainly have been regarded by Holmes’s bad man as valid law. For many critics of the modern state, the positivist image of the state as no different than a gun wielding gangster captured an uncomfortable truth. There are many

examples of rogue states. Think of the apartheid state as a gangster state. Some legal philosophers have claimed that all states are gangster states under conditions of capitalism. The German philosopher, Karl Marx described the state as a gun in the hands of the capitalists that is used to exploit workers and suppress the class struggle. He dreamed of an end to capitalism and a communist community that would flourish after the “withering away of the state” (Quintana, 2026: 37). Similar claims have been made about the role of the state and its laws in the hands of colonialists and imperial powers (Woldeyes, 2025: 24).

8 The moment we see the state as nothing but stronger gunman that arrives on the scene, as the positivists of 19th century suggested, we forgo the ability to distinguish between good and bad states. We are therefore tempted to turn away from the state and its guns towards faith communities or civil society movements as the only source of hope. Against the capitalist state, Marx dreamed about the withering away of the state (see above) and decolonial critics of the imperial state evoke a spiritual world untouched by colonialism (see above). Feminist legal philosophers equally speak about an alternative community based on a relational ethic of care and that will replace the retributive ethic of justice that is enforced by the modern state and its laws (see Morris, 2025: 29) All these legal philosophers hope for a better world beyond and without the state.

9 I am sceptical about these visions of community outside and beyond the guns (and laws) of the state – communities inspired and normatively

guided by art and literature and religion alone. The social destruction caused by gangsterism in the Western Cape provides us with a warning about these dreams of communities beyond and without the guns of the state. Gangsterism reminds us that the end of the

state does not and will not mean the end of guns. On the contrary. The idea of a spontaneous and free community is a dangerously romantic notion. In the struggle for social justice, we abandon the idea of the strong state at our own peril.

10 Where does this inevitable dependence on the state, its laws, and its guns leave us? Are we, as ordinary people, doomed to an inevitable turf war, not only between various gangs, but also between gangs and the state for a monopoly of force? More generally, are we, even when things are going very well by law and order standards, doomed to remain trapped in an inverted gunman situation? Is the strong state just a more powerful gun man – or tax funded protection racket – as John Austin, Karl Marx, and General Maphwanya seem to think? I wish to urge you not to reach this equally sceptical conclusion. There is another lesson to be learned from the discussion above. We do not merely want the state to be stronger than the gangsters, we want the state to be *different* from the gangsters. We do not want a gunman conception of the state and the law. The problem is that early positivists, such as Austin and Holmes, do not enable us to understand why the democratic state and its laws are (or at least could be) different in character or quality from a gang and its commands. We also need a different perspective on

the state and its laws than that of Holmes's bad man. We need to rethink the force of the law beyond a narrow focus on the effective enforcement of the law. Recall: Austin said the law is whatever rules of conduct the state threatens to enforce (the command theory of law) while Holmes said the law is whatever the state actually enforces (the bad man theory of law). Both saw themselves as progressive thinkers who wanted to purge law of the conservative religious moralism of the pre-industrial common law era. They therefore insisted on an absolute separation of law and morality, substance and form. We need to rethink this separation, not by turning to a new version of Christian nationalism (such as the Make American Great Again (MAGA) movement in the United States), but by rethinking the inner morality of law from a radically democratic perspective.

11 As a starting point for a different understanding of the state and its laws, we need to revisit the idea that the subjects of the law inevitably find themselves in an inverted gunman situation. A student of Austin, Herbert Hart, wrote a very influential book in the early 1960s, called *The Concept of Law* (1972), in which he criticised Austin's definition of law as a command by a sovereign backed by a threat. Hart redefined law as a system of rules, as opposed to commands. The difference between a rule and a command becomes clear if we take another look at the gunman situation. In a gunman situation, Hart said, those without guns are *obliged* to obey the commands they receive or suffer the consequences; however, they are not under any legal *obligation* or duty to do so. This distinction is fundamental.

We feel a moral obligation to obey a rule of law, which is absent when we do what a gunman says in order to stay alive. Neither Austin's command theory of law nor Holmes's prediction theory of law can account for this inner dimension of law. Not all commands generate obligations. Obligations arise when we recognise a command, not merely as a brute fact, but as a valid legal rule. Every legal system must therefore consist of at least two orders or types of rules. There are the primary rules of conduct that tell us what to do or not to do. These are proscription and prescriptions similar to Austin's commands. However, there is also a secondary order of rules behind the primary rules. This secondary order contains the rule of recognition which specifies under which conditions a command issued by a state will be recognised as a legal rule.

12 What is the relevance of Hart's intervention for our discussion about gangsterism in the Western Cape? The answer depends on how we formulate the rule of recognition. Hart worked within the modern European constitutional tradition, which the German sociologist Max Weber described at the turn of the 20th century as a tradition in which authority is based on written legal documents, most notably a constitution (Glassman, 2021: 253–264). In this tradition, the rule of recognition differs from a rule that recognises the authority of Kings and monarchs (the divine right of the old European and African Kings to rule based on their traditional role). It also differs from a rule of recognition that recognises the authority of a person of great charisma or personal quality (an army general after a coup; or a liberation

hero after a revolution; or a gang leader after a turf war). In constitutional democracies, the people do not recognise any asserted traditional or personal claim to be the ruler. The people recognise a ruler to rule on very strict terms and conditions in an elaborate rule of recognition, or what we call a constitution. The constitution sets out the terms and conditions upon which the people is willing to recognise the commands issued by the state as laws and rules that imposes legal obligations.

13 What then is the rule of recognition of the South African legal system and how does it relate to the fight against gangsterism? In other words, under which conditions do we recognise the moral obligation to obey the laws of the state as legal rules and not merely as military commands? South Africa has a pluralistic legal order, with several sources of law, including indigenous customs, common law precedents, statutory rules, and constitutionally entrenched human rights. However, the Constitution does not recognise these laws because they reflect longstanding customary practices (as in a system of traditional authority) or because they have been revealed to us by a charismatic son or prophet of god (as in a culture of charismatic authority). The Constitution makes clear that “we, the people of South Africa” only recognise the commands issued by the state as legal rules if those commands were issued in a democratic manner by or on the authority of a democratically elected legislature. The Constitutional Court has explained that the supremacy of the Constitution, as an elaborate rule of recognition, means that the Court will only recognise and enforce laws that are

rational and *reasonable* (Courtis, 2011: 4). A law is *rational* if it serves a legitimate constitutional objective. Arbitrary laws, which amount to a naked exercise of power or force, are irrational and will not be recognised by the Court as creating valid legal obligations. A naked show of force can never create legal obligations. A law is *reasonable* if it pursues a legitimate government objective by appropriate means. Any law that limits the human rights of those involved in a manner that is out of proportion to the end or objective it seeks to achieve, is unreasonable and will not be recognised by the Court as creating valid legal obligations.

14 We are now able to understand the fundamental difference between the democratic state and the gunman situation. In sharp contrast to both the original and inverted gunman situations, any person who is subject to a law has the right to challenge the rationality or reasonableness of that law in court. Etienne Mureinik (1994: 10), a South African constitutional scholar, famously said in the early 1990 that the Constitution was the bridge from apartheid, as a culture of force, to democracy, as a culture of justification. In a democracy, those subject to the law of the state has the legal right to ask “why” and to demand from the state a justification of its laws against the rule of recognition. This is the fundamental difference between the gunman situation and the law, between a command and a rule: A gunman need not justify his or her commands before resorting to force; the state cannot employ any force unless and until such time as it has justified its commands as democratically enacted

laws that meet the tests of rationality and reasonableness.

15 If we want to restore law and order on in the gang ridden areas of the Western Cape, we do not simply want to restore the “monopoly of force” wielded by the state through the police and the army. We do not want a military state that is stronger than the gangs. We want a state that is *different* from the gunmen. Sending in soldiers is not enough to distinguish the guns wielded by the state from those wielded by the gangs. Restoring law and order does not simply mean enhancing law enforcement (even if it also means that), it means restoring the preconditions under which the people of the Western Cape and South Africa more broadly can look at the commands of the state as democratically legitimate laws.

16 Whether those preconditions exist in the communities of the Western Cape that are targeted by gangsterism is open to debate. In an election year, it is easy to focus on the civil and political preconditions of democracy (freedom of expression; the right to vote) at the expense of the cultural and socio-economic preconditions of equal citizenship and participatory parity in society (Fraser, 2008). If gangsterism is a symptom, the illness might well be our floundering constitutional democracy. It is the duty of the state, in its response to gangsterism, to lift the people of the Western Cape out of the perpetual turf war in which they might rightly feel trapped. The state must restore a basic respect for law by restoring a basic respect for democracy. This in turn requires urgent attention to the socio-

economic preconditions of democratic citizenship.

17 I started this short presentation by asking whether we need a stronger or a different type of state in response to gangsterism in the Western Cape. It should now be clear that, from the perspective of legal philosophy, the answer is both.

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SECTION F

Agents of change

Dr Braam Hanekom, Michéle Tallies and Henriette Abrahams discussed in their session a number of questions, namely "Who are the agents of change? What are the available resources? What can civil society do? What can or cannot the state – at all levels of government – do? And What must not be ignored?" Their presentations together offer a deeply textured account of gangsterism in the Western Cape, reframing it not simply as a matter of crime, but as a systemic crisis rooted in governance failures, developmental gaps, and enduring structural inequality. Read together, they shift the analytical lens away from narrow law-and-order approaches toward a more complex understanding of how violence is produced, sustained, and potentially transformed.

Who are the agents of change?

At the centre of this analysis is a rethinking of who the real agents of change are. Abrahams insists most forcefully that communities themselves

must be recognised as primary actors. Far from being passive victims or "voiceless" subjects, residents of areas such as Bonteheuwel are already actively engaged in producing safety through dense networks of care, informal intelligence, and everyday practices of vigilance. This form of community knowledge is tacit, relational, and highly localised, yet it remains marginal to formal systems of policing and governance. Hanekom extends the field of agency to include civil society and, in particular, faith-based organisations, which he sees as uniquely positioned to provide moral leadership, articulate shared values, and foster social cohesion. Tallies, meanwhile, draws attention to young people themselves and the institutions that shape their development. By showing how gangs fulfil core psychosocial needs – identity, belonging, recognition, and economic participation – she reframes youth not only as vulnerable to recruitment but as central to any meaningful intervention. The state, across all three accounts, remains an indispen-

able but compromised actor: it holds formal authority and resources, yet its legitimacy is eroded by corruption, inefficiency, and an inability to protect those who cooperate with it.

What are the available resources?

A striking point of convergence across the presentations is that the problem is not an absolute lack of resources, but rather their misrecognition and misallocation. Abrahams highlights the depth and sophistication of community intelligence, which often surpasses that of formal law enforcement but cannot be effectively shared due to the absence of trust and protection. At the same time, significant public funds are directed toward centralised policing and security, while community-based safety initiatives remain drastically under-resourced. Hanekom and Tallies both point to the importance of social infrastructure (families, schools, churches, sports clubs, and other community organisations) as critical resources that have been weakened over time but remain essential for building resilience. Tallies adds a crucial developmental dimension, arguing that the capacity to provide identity, belonging, and recognition is itself a key social resource, one that gangs have appropriated in contexts where formal institutions have failed. In this sense, the persistence of gangsterism reflects not only economic deprivation but also a failure to invest in the relational and developmental fabric of communities.

What can civil society do?

Within this landscape, civil society emerges as both a moral and practical force. Hanekom argues that faith communities, in particular, must

reclaim a prophetic role, speaking truth to power while also helping to build a shared vision and common purpose across fragmented communities. At the same time, civil society organisations are called upon to do more than advocate; they must actively participate in constructing alternatives. This includes creating spaces and programmes that replicate the functions gangs currently provide, i.e., offering young people belonging, recognition, and pathways to meaning, but in ways that are life-affirming rather than destructive. Abrahams underscores the importance of supporting and resourcing grassroots safety initiatives, while all three presenters emphasise the need for dialogue, healing, and the transformation of social norms, particularly in relation to trauma, masculinity, and violence. Civil society, in this view, is not supplementary to state action but constitutive of any viable solution.

What is the role of the state?

The role of the state, however, remains both necessary and deeply contested. On the one hand, the state has clear responsibilities: to reform and strengthen the criminal justice system, to ensure effective and consistent enforcement of existing laws, and to allocate resources in ways that support community-based and developmental interventions. Hanekom points to the need for more robust legal tools and enforcement strategies, while Abrahams calls for a redistribution of funding toward local safety initiatives and co-governance structures. Tallies emphasises the importance of investing in education, family support, and economic opportunities that address the root causes of gang involvement.

On the other hand, all three presenters are sceptical of the state's ability to resolve the crisis through policing alone. Suppression strategies, as Tallies shows, fail because they do not address the underlying functions that gangs fulfil. Abrahams highlights the profound trust deficit between communities and law enforcement, fuelled by corruption, information leaks, and the lack of protection for informants. In this context, the state cannot simply demand partnership; it must earn it through accountability and demonstrable change. Nor can it replicate the local knowledge and relational networks that exist within communities. Its role must therefore shift from one of control to one of enabling, resourcing, and collaborating.

What must not be ignored?

What must not be ignored, across all three accounts, is the structural and historical nature of the problem. Abrahams frames ongoing violence as a form of structural abandonment, where the withdrawal or failure of the state constitutes a kind of violence in itself. Tallies situates gangsterism within the enduring legacies of apartheid spatial planning, forced removals, and persistent inequality, showing how these conditions continue to shape the social worlds of young people. Hanekom adds that gangsterism thrives within a broader ecosystem defined by poverty, weak institutions, trauma, and the absence of a shared

moral framework. Particularly significant is the emphasis on trauma as both an individual and collective condition, shaping behaviour, decision-making, and social relations in ways that perpetuate cycles of violence. Equally critical is the recognition that gangs are not arbitrary formations but functional systems that meet real needs. Ignoring this reality, as Tallies makes clear, leads to interventions that are not only ineffective but potentially counterproductive.

Conclusion

In sum, the three presentations converge on a shared conclusion: gangsterism persists because it is embedded in a set of interlocking systems (social, developmental, economic, and political) that continue to reproduce it. Addressing it requires more than technical fixes or intensified policing. It demands a fundamental reorientation in which communities are recognised as central agents of change, resources are redirected toward local and developmental initiatives, and the state is reconfigured as an accountable partner rather than a distant authority. Above all, it requires the construction of alternative systems of belonging, identity, and opportunity that can compete with, and ultimately displace, the functions currently served by gangs. Without such shifts, efforts to combat gangsterism will remain fragmented, and the conditions that sustain it will endure.

18

Six questions to answer

Braam Hanekom

Chairperson
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Thank you, friends for the privilege to be here. I was the Director for the Centre for Public Witness for 10 years. In the process we engaged with more than 100 towns all over South Africa. We saw many communities and heard a lot of stories. May I start with a disclaimer: I've never lived in a gang-infested area, but I've worked in gang-infested areas. Just one example: The other day I was in Klipfontein, next to Philippi East. We were busy restoring a cemetery and a guy came to me. He suddenly showed me his gun and he said, "I'll protect you if you give me R50, nobody will touch you." Now, he hasn't got proper clothes, no food, but a gun in his hand. That for me was a defining moment.

I heard a lot of emotion here this morning. I heard a call to action. What

we need now is a systematic point of intervention. So, without further ado, I want to try and answer the question by asking six questions.

Gangsterism flourishes in an ecosystem that creates an environment that enables gangs to renew and perpetuate itself. *The first question is; therefore, how do we destroy the ecosystem of gangs?*

Several people alluded to the fact that we're dealing with an ecosystem. Now I want to ask you how do you destroy an ecosystem?

By destroying the habitat. Gangs flourish in a certain habitat. We need to destroy it.

Secondly, gangs will destroy themselves through overexploitation. If



Dr Braam Hanekom
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you cut down too many trees, it will destroy the forest. So, the good news is that gangs, if they continue as they continue, will destroy themselves.

Thirdly, you introduce invasive species. So, you don't fight the gangs, you build alternatives. You need good healthy alternative spaces, especially for the youth.

Lastly, you raise the temperature. Turn up the heat on them – making it very, very hot for them.

What are the two main drivers of gangsterism?

The two main drivers of gangsterism are in my mind a dysfunctional legal and criminal justice system on the one hand and on the other hand poverty and poor government. We've heard this repeatedly today.

What did the authorities in Chicago do to deal with the challenge?

I'm afraid to use examples from the United States for obvious reasons but I do want to give you the Chicago example. What happened in Chicago? Chicago was a gang-infested area. You would have seen the movies and heard about the mafia. They did three things to change communities: Intensive federal intervention, new legal tools and the repeal of prohibition legislation.

What does it mean in practice? With the end of the prohibition of liquor, they removed the primary source of income. I'm asking the question, this is dramatic. What is the implication for drugs and the legalisation of drugs in South Africa. In South Africa I cannot currently get an anti-inflammatory drug at a pharmacy without the prescription of a doctor. But I can very easily get drugs on the streets. Remove the primary source of income.

The second one was the Rico Act of 1970 which allowed the state to prosecute gang leaders for crimes committed by their followers. We are dealing with a legal system that doesn't allow the police to do what they must do.

The authorities in Chicago also tackled tax evasion. You need to do lifestyle audits on everyone that you suspect of gang involvement. I saw with my own eyes in Khayelitsha, how two Porsche Cayenne cars were parked at a tiny little house. It doesn't make sense. We need to scrutinise luxurious and flamboyant lifestyles of everyone.

Finally, a network of informants was created, and we saw increased professionalism in law enforcement. The work of FBI boss Edgar Hoover is a good example.

W*hat was the main thing that enabled gangsterism after these interventions?*

Having said it all, the people in Chicago will acknowledge that gang violence continued in poverty-stricken areas.

W*hat are the so-called "pillars of poverty" that we need to bring down?*

Let me first summarise it:

- The lack of proper education, the teaching of skills and the formation of a civility;
- Psychological entrapment and trauma – hopelessness and victimhood;
- The absence of a moral framework and values that build a society;
- The absence of social cohesion, mutual respect and a common cause;
- The absence of healthy institutions, including sport clubs, churches and families.

Gangsterism is infecting now also the rural areas of South Africa. Take the Saldanha area for instance. So let me elaborate on what we must do to bring down the pillars of poverty: The first is not only education but teaching people civility.

Secondly, we need to challenge and change the psychological framework of people. People live with trauma. At the recent national dialogue someone gave a fascinating presentation on what happens with traumatised people the moment they are challenged or reminded of their pain. At that moment of decision-making, rationality walks out and the emotional brain takes over. Then it's just violence and murder.

You know gangsters also have values. I once saw a movie where they asked a guy why he killed someone? He said, "You know, he didn't obey the rules!" I mean it was a mafia guy. You know they also live with rules and obscure values. We need to establish a new moral framework for our society.

Fourthly, we need a common cause to build social cohesion. You will see that communities that are flourishing all over the world are communities where you will find a common cause and a common vision with strong leadership that can formulate that vision and take people along with them.

And finally, we need healthy institutions: families, sport, clubs, culture, government institutions and NGOs.

These are the five pillars. We need to work on civility, trauma, values, common cause, and healthy institutions. If you build your congregation, you're fighting crime. If you build a school, you're fighting crime. If you support a rugby club, you're fighting the crime.

Many things were said about the youth and gang violence, and what happens when young people feel they have no stake in society. I remember I was invited to a dialogue where young people burnt down the city hall. I asked the people why they did it. It was a beautiful centuries old sandstone building. The answer was the following: "They haven't got food, they haven't got parents, they haven't got education, they haven't got property. They haven't got anything, so they don't care."

What should be the role of the church and civil society in all of this?

I asked Brigadier Hartzenberg this morning, "What must the church say to the government?" We don't have power, but we still have authority to keep on speaking truth to power. But the church is failing the nation right now. And one of the reasons why the church is failing is because we don't stand together. We don't work in unity.

Civil society and especially faith institutions must play a prophetic as well as a creative role in all of this. The church has been too silent, and it seems that church does not want to get involved. Government wants to spend billions to fight crime and violence. I think it is time to ask them for a small portion of that money to facilitate dialogues in communities to deal with the challenges. A programme where we start with the student leadership in schools in affected areas could be a game changer.

Lastly, what's the church's position on the military in gang infected areas? I want to add my voice. More than R800 million will be spent on the exercise. I think it is way of extending the budget of the Defence Force. They're out of money and they must feed the soldiers and keep them busy for a while. It could also be an election campaign.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these thoughts with you.

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Why gangsterism ‘works’: A developmental and contextual analysis of youth gang involvement on the Cape Flats

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Introduction

Gangsterism remains one of the most persistent social challenges in the Western Cape, particularly in communities on the Cape Flats. Conventional approaches tend to frame gang involvement primarily as deviance or criminality. While such perspectives are not incorrect, they are incomplete. This article advances an alternative framing: rather than asking *why gangsterism exists*, we ask *why it works*.

This reframing shifts the focus from moral judgement to functional analysis. It

recognises that youth behaviour in high-risk environments is often adaptive to contextual realities rather than inherently irrational (MacMaster, 2010).

Understanding the functional appeal of gangsterism provides a stronger foundation for developing effective interventions.

This paper integrates developmental theory, particularly Erikson’s model of psychosocial development, with South African research on gangsterism to argue that gangs operate as parallel social systems that meet critical adolescent

developmental needs (Van Wyk and Theron, 2005).

Adolescence as a critical developmental phase

Adolescence represents a pivotal developmental stage characterised by identity formation, social positioning, and meaning-making. Erikson conceptualised this period as a crisis between identity formation and identity confusion, where individuals seek a coherent sense of self (Carvalho and Veiga, 2022).

Research consistently identifies three central developmental needs during adolescence which includes, identity (Who am I?), belonging (Where do I fit?) and status and recognition (Do I matter?) (Carvalho and Veiga, 2022; Chetty, 2015; MacMaster, 2010; Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo, 2021; Van Wyk and Theron, 2005). These processes are not merely internal but are shaped through interaction with social environments. Psychosocial development depends on the interplay between individual, relational, and structural contexts (Carvalho and Veiga, 2022).

Gangsterism as a developmentally functional system Meeting core psychosocial needs

Gangs provide adolescents with immediate access to the very elements central to psychosocial development described as a clear identity



Ms Michéle Tallies (née Willemse)
Supplied

(“you are one of us”), a strong sense of belonging (“brother-hood”), recognition and status (respect, power) and economic participation (income through illicit economies).

Empirical research confirms that youth are drawn to gangs precisely because they offer belonging, recognition, and survival within contexts of deprivation (Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo, 2020; Van Wyk and Theron, 2005). Furthermore, gangs provide structured roles, rules, and recognition – elements that contribute to a coherent sense of self, particularly in environments marked by instability (Carvalho and Veiga, 2022; Chetty, 2015).

Gangs as parallel social systems

Gangsterism can be understood as an informal system that substitutes for weakened formal institutions such as families, schools, and community organisations (Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo, 2020; Van Wyk and Theron, 2005). When these institutions are inconsistent or inaccessible, gangs' step in to meet developmental needs (Van Wyk and Theron, 2005). This aligns with findings that adolescents actively interpret gangs as spaces of recognition, identity, and survival rather than simply drifting into them (Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo, 2020). Importantly, this suggests that gangsterism is not accidental but systemically functional.

Belonging, identity, and substitute family structures

Gang structures often function as surrogate families, particularly in contexts of family disruption. Research highlights how gangsterism provides substitute familial bonds, rituals and rites of passage and strong group identity and loyalty. MacMaster (2010) describes gangs as alternative family systems that offer belonging, acceptance, and recognition to youth who lack these in traditional structures. This dynamic is historically rooted. Forced removals and apartheid-era spatial planning disrupted community cohesion, contributing to the emergence of gangs as mechanisms of social reconstruction (Chetty, 2015; Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo, 2021; Van Wyk and Theron, 2005).

Status, masculinity, and power

Gang environments construct identity through highly gendered norms,

particularly forms of hypermasculinity (Chetty, 2015). In these contexts, violence becomes a pathway to recognition, fear operates as a form of social currency and dominance is equated with respect. Research indicates that adolescents in gang contexts pursue visibility and identity through violence and power structures, especially where alternative avenues for achievement are limited (Chetty, 2015; Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo, 2020; Van Wyk and Theron, 2005). This reinforces the idea that gang-related violence is not random but socially meaningful (Chetty, 2015; Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo, 2021).

Economic function: The role of drugs and opportunity

Gangsterism is not only psychosocial but also economic. The drug economy provides income opportunities, entry into local economic systems and a sense of agency and participation (Chetty, 2015). Evidence shows that drugs are widely accessible in Cape Flats communities, with over half of learners reporting easy access. Substance use and gang activity are deeply intertwined, particularly in school environments where drug use correlates with dropout and long-term disadvantage (Chetty, 2015). Thus, gangsterism functions as both a social and economic survival strategy (Chetty, 2015; Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo, 2020; Van Wyk and Theron, 2005).

The Western Cape context: structural drivers

Gangsterism cannot be understood outside its socio-historical context

(Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo, 2020). Key structural drivers include forced removals and spatial marginalisation, persistent poverty and unemployment, weak educational systems and family disruption (Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo, 2020). The legacy of apartheid continues to shape the social fabric of the Cape Flats, creating conditions conducive to gang formation (Van Wyk and Theron, 2005). High youth unemployment and limited access to opportunity further reinforce gang involvement as a viable alternative (Chetty, 2015).

Discussion: Gangsterism as a maladaptive developmental solution

This analysis supports the central argument that gangsterism is best understood as a maladaptive developmental solution to unmet psychosocial needs. It is not merely criminal nor merely individual deviance but a systemic response to structural and developmental gaps (Van Wyk and Theron, 2005). This reframing has critical implications. Interventions that focus solely on suppression (e.g., policing) are unlikely to succeed because they do not address the underlying developmental functions gangs fulfil and often fail to address the real needs of youth simultaneously in an integrated way (Van Wyk and Theron, 2005).

Implications for intervention

Effective interventions must consider the broader social context and replicate the functions gangs provide, but in prosocial ways (MacMaster, 2010; Van Wyk and Theron, 2005). This requires:

- Multi-systemic approaches: Interventions must engage family, school, community, and policy levels simultaneously (Van der Westhuizen and Gawulayo, 2020; Van Wyk and Theron, 2005).
- Identity-focused programming: Youth need structured opportunities for identity formation, belonging, and recognition (Carvalho and Veiga, 2022; Chetty, 2015).
- Economic inclusion: Access to legitimate income and opportunity is essential (Chetty, 2015).
- Strengthening institutions: Schools, families, and community organisations must become stable, accessible, and meaningful developmental contexts (Chetty, 2015; Van Wyk and Theron, 2005).
- Community and faith-based responses: Faith communities, in particular, are uniquely positioned to provide belonging, meaning, and relational support within a communal framework (MacMaster, 2010).

Conclusion

Gangsterism “works” because it meets fundamental human needs during a critical developmental period within contexts where formal systems fall short. It provides identity, belonging, status, and economic opportunity in ways that are immediate, consistent, and meaningful. Understanding gangsterism as a functional system does not justify it – it explains it. And it is only through such understanding that meaningful, sustainable disruption becomes possible. Interventions must therefore move

beyond suppression and engage with the broader social, developmental, and contextual realities that sustain gang involvement (Van Wyk and Theron, 2005).

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20

Who are the agents of change?

Henriette Abrahams

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Introduction

Thank you everybody for inviting us to share with you.

I thought let me situate myself because I'm from where I hear the bullets and I've been fighting this for so many years and it keeps on falling on deaf ears. So, I want to speak from my experience, from our community experience and what it is that we have been trying to do, how do we see moving forward.

It's no use working on its own. It's no use if we keep it a township thing, because it's not a Coloured township thing, it's cross our borders. It is by time that we break down this racial divide. We must be honest. We must be true. We must know that crime happens all over. I live in Bonteheuwel. So

when crime happens in Bonteheuwel, it goes to my neighbours in Langa. It affects wherever is affected. So we need to organise as neighbourhoods together in a particular locality.

It is important that we know what it is and who it is that we are fighting, and that we are going to the fight. We must go with a gun to a gunfight and not with a knife. I want to say "comrades", as we did back in the day in 1994.

Memory as indictment

In 1994–1995 I was working on a part-time basis for the Community Peace Foundation (CPF). They were first based in Bellville and later they moved next to the Observatory train station. We went around and we trained people, training police

officers and communities in human rights and community policing. The country did not have a new constitution, yet. We trained the people around the principles of care. What does it mean to structure, to build? What is the purpose and the role of a Community Police Forum (CPF)? Why do we need to have community court assessors? We were training them in what would become the Bill of Rights. The state was fragile, unfinished, but full of promise. We believed the state was going to learn how to listen. We believed power would move closer to the people. We believed safety would be co-produced, not imposed. I was optimistic. Many of us were.

Thirty-one years later, the situation has worsened. And I want to say this plainly: to stand here 31 years later, in a country where children still dive under beds when gunshots ring out, where mothers calculate safe routes every morning, where communities live under siege, is heartbreaking. People say, "I can't sleep because of I'm afraid that they're going to break in. I'm afraid that they're going to shoot. I'm afraid that the people going to the drug house is going to kill each other and my response is, I must be up and away."

Thirty-one years later after we have done that work, we thought we were putting things in place where we're going to have safety, we're going to have protection, we're going to have peace. Today it is for me almost 100 times worse. This is more than heartbreaking it is an indictment of the state.

Structural and cultural violence

When we talk about violence, we are trained to talk about gangs, crime statistics, hotspots, and deployment numbers. That language hides something. Because violence is not only what gangs do.

Violence is also what happens when the state withdraws, delays, deflects, bureaucratises, and blames. Violence is children growing up traumatised under constant gunfire; families who do not sleep until everyone is home; women doing unpaid safety labour while being told to "partner" with law enforcement. This is not a failure of culture. This is structural abandonment.

In our townships we experience this trauma in our bodies, on a daily basis. What we find is that this state of ours is violent towards its people. Let's go right to the issues. The fact that we have corruption, the fact that we have non-service delivery, the fact that we have a national government and a provincial government fretting and causing non-service delivery. It is structural violence against the poor. There's no other answer for that.

We can have, with all due respect, these nice academic analyses, but let's name it for what it is. It's structural violence and the state has abandoned communities such as mine. We are on our own. Therefore the solutions that we need to look at are prefigurative politics, democratic confederalism. How do we organise ourselves to protect ourselves and to work towards prosperous working class communities across our country because this state is not doing it for us. The organs of the state are not doing it for us.

Community intelligence in action

People all around us are treating the poor as the voiceless, they name us "the voiceless". I'm sorry, we have voices. We are able to critically engage. We are able to name our problems. People are saying, "Yes, you people know; we think this is the problem. We know what the solution is." Try your luck!



Ms Henriette Abrahams
Screengrab, Jaap Durand Chair video, UWC

Meanwhile, we have the solutions. We make it work for us: neighbourhood watches doing their beats. Safety patrols doing their beats. The school bus doing their beats. The WhatsApp groups doing their beats. There are people doing their beats in our blocks and people sitting by the windows and they're doing their beats, also across the fields whether you're living in a maisonette or wherever. We have our own structures.

Let me be very clear. I am in the centre of Bonteheuwel. I know which gangs are making which moves, when shootings happen, who they target and who they do not, and how the drug trade shifts and moves across neighbourhoods. When there is a hit, when there is a sexual assault, community members come to my house or Bonteheuwel Development Forum members' houses. They call; they give information in person. They know I am

someone who will listen, who can act, who can hold their risk. This knowledge is tacit, embedded, and relational. It is learned through lived proximity. It is not in a SAPS database. It is not captured in a patrol log.

We know where gangs hide after a hit. If the Fancy Boys strike here, they move to Mitchell's Plain, Woodstock, or surrounding informal settlements. We map it. We anticipate retaliation. We watch the impact on children's sports, on school attendance, on everyday life. This is community intelligence. This is a resource the state does not have and often cannot protect.

Trust and knowledge flows

SAPS, we have better intelligence than you, much better intelligence networks than you. Yet, you are not trusting us. There's a trust deficit, as others have been saying today. We are not protected because of widespread corruption.

When the Madlanga Commission and the *Ad hoc* committee of Parliament came, we could have told them beforehand: We knew of this corruption all along. Why are you surprised? We've been telling you for years that the state, the police, the gangsters, the underworld and business are working together. We knew that all along, whether it's at a micro or macro level.

People came to us and said, "Do you know who is sitting in the PRASA stakeholders' meeting? The Fancy Boys gang leader is sitting there. You knew it from Saturday's or Sunday's newspapers. We knew it for three years already.

We knew of the train lines that have been stolen and their networks. We got that. We gave that information to SAPS in Bishop Lavis. We said, "Here, there, there . . . they are there now. This is the registration number; that is a stolen bakkie." We did your work for you! If they are killing, if they are maiming, if they are whatever, we feed them the information.

We don't want to feed that information any longer, for we know who the corrupt people are in that precinct.

There is a dangerous lie circulating that communities do not want to cooperate with the police. That is false. People talk, but they share information horizontally, with trusted neighbours, mentors, faith actors, and community organisers.

They do not share it upward because the state cannot protect them. Informers are exposed. Whistleblowers are not safeguarded. Cases collapse. Information leaks. Visible policing is not enough. Foot soldiers can be arrested. Networks survive. I have been told — more than once — that criminals knew exactly when I was at the police station. This is not theory. This is risk without protection. And yet, the state tells us to "partner". Partner with what? With

what guarantees? With what trust?

Then, when we get the correct people, we feed them information. In fact, these SAPS commanders don't have enough data to answer their calls when we call those lines.

Justice cluster failures

So, if we get it right at SAPS, now we move on to the NPA, the National Prosecuting Authority. Now that's a battle at the courts, all of its own. We have laws, the Prevention of Organised Crime Act, and asset forfeiture legislation, but enforcement is inconsistent, politically constrained, and rarely felt at community level.

I have marched from drug merchant to drug merchant with SAPS and Metro Police, pointing out where drugs are sold, where gangs operate, in private homes that are not state-owned. And what happens? Rarely are arrests made. Rarely is the network dismantled.

You cannot build safety from below while betrayal operates from above. When detectives, prosecutors, and magistrates cannot carry cases, when witness protection is inadequate, the responsibility of safety falls back on communities, those who already bear the risk.

Budget and austerity resource realities

Another thing is the exploitation of the state, this Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), community development workers, and the slave wage they're giving us: these ambassadors, the auxiliary social workers, CPFs, neighbourhood watches, School Governing Bodies. It's again slavery, giving our people slave jobs, not valuing what we are bringing to the table and the knowledge that we are holding.

Amen, amen vir die government wat ons meer grant geld gegee het, al is die budget ge-cut, even though proper decent work has not been created for our people to move away from their addiction, to get some hope, to get some dignity, to get some right.

This is deliberate in design. It is designed. Poverty is designed by the system of this country and the world. We are designed to be fighting one another. We are designed to have crime, corruption, addiction, all of those things.

Then we're not even talking intergenerational violence and intergenerational addiction and substance abuse. So, this is a systemic issue. In fact they have the nerve to say, "Parents don't know how to treat to teach their children." So, the blame are being shifted upon us while ignoring the systemic issues.

Let's talk about money. The City of Cape Town allocates R6.7 billion to R7 billion for safety and security, most of it toward law enforcement. Provincially, nearly R4 billion is earmarked for anti-gang and community safety initiatives. Yet, in Ward 50 (Bonteheuwel), the line-item budget for neighbourhood watch patrol equipment is R100 000. That is it. This is not just a funding gap. It is a structural choice. Centralised enforcement is resourced. Local, community-led safety work is under-resourced and fragmented.

We already know how to use resources effectively. Co-governed ward safety tables, matching funds for local youth safety hubs, training for trauma and first aid. These do not require billions. They require power and accountability.

Safety commons and co-governance

So, what is the way forward for us? I don't think that the CPFs of today are still relevant. I think that they should be taken out from under SAPS, because our issues are interdepartmental, interlinked. The bureaucracy under SAPS, the big man

politics, and the patriarchy within these systems are failing us, whereas we, the mothers in our communities are hitting the beat.

So, we need to work towards a safety commons and we need to understand who these stakeholders are, and what are their roles? The community's role should be in the centre; we should not be on the fringes. Our voices should be in the centre. We must be party to co-design. *Ons weet wie die gangsters is.* We know why that auntie *smokkels* there.

Safety is a shared responsibility. It is built through relationships, sustained by care, and governed collectively. Shared communication platforms, early-warning protocols, community-led patrol scheduling, trauma response capacity. These are the core of a safety commons.

Communities are not empty vessels for policy. They are sites of knowledge production; co-creation matters. Imposed solutions fail. We know what are the alternatives. What are alternative strategies to push back, to work out of prevention programmes: the sports, the arts, the churches, the camps, the youth camps, the trauma counselling. Also: we need to not only focus on youth, we need to focus on men. Men need to heal as well.

Closing challenge

Communities are not waiting for solutions. They are already producing safety under conditions of abandonment. The crisis is not the absence of plans or laws. The crisis is the refusal to share power, resource what works, and protect those doing the work.

If this conference is serious about change, community knowledge must move from the margins to the centre, not as testimony, but as authority. Safety is not a favour. It is not a pilot. It is a constitutional obligation. And we will keep organising, with or without permission.

Amandla!

SECTION G

New pathways and overview

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Notes on the way forward: Principles for new pathways to fight crime?

Llewellyn MacMaster

Chairperson
Cape Crime Crisis Coalition, Cape Town

Crime on the Cape Flats, and across South Africa, is not merely a policing problem. It is the visible symptom of deep social dysfunction, shaped by historical injustice, structural inequality, trauma, and institutional failure. As highlighted in the seminar framework, any meaningful response must move from diagnosis → dialogue → direction → action.

The way forward requires not quick fixes, but new pathways grounded in shared principles.

In this presentation I offer ten broad outlines for a way forward, abstracting the underlying principles, i.e. moving from crime control to social justice,

responsibility is not only that of the state, the breaking of the institutional silos, the active involvement of communities in the fight against gangsterism, prevention rather than reaction to violence, addressing trauma and healing, ethical and accountable policing, youth at the centre, courageous conversations, and measurable commitments

From 'crime control' to social justice

It is clear that we must shift from a narrow law-and-order or security mindset to a justice-centred approach.

- Crime is deeply rooted in poverty, exclusion, and spatial injustice,

- Safety must include dignity, opportunity, and belonging, and
- Policing alone cannot fix what inequality has produced.

Principle: There can be no sustainable safety without social justice.

This is in line with the "Imam Haron Road Call to Action and Declaration of Intent", a unified statement by faith leaders, communities and civil society adopted on 18 July 2025. This was a gathering convened by the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC), in partnership with the Western Cape Provincial Council of Churches (WCPCC) and the Cape Crime Crisis Coalition (CCCC). The call coming from this gathering was: Forward to a just peace!

Whole-of-society responsibility

We all know the phrase "whole of government, whole of society" that is being used often. The reality is that in both spheres of government and society it generally remains a nice phrase that sees little practicality.

- Crime prevention is not only the responsibility of the state.
- Government, civil society, faith communities, families, and business all have roles,
- Communities must move from being victims or spectators to become active agents, and
- Collaboration must replace fragmentation.

Principle: Safety is co-designed and co-produced, not outsourced.

This seems to be a huge and serious challenge. There is indeed too much fragmentation and what I call "territoriality". This is seriously weakening our impact, while organised

crime has evolved into sophisticated criminal networks and ecosystems. It was emphasised during the seminar that gangs and gangsters are actually in the minority in our communities, but their negative impact seems to be much greater than our collective efforts.

Breaking the silos

This principle is closely connected to the previous one. One of the clearest failures identified is that institutions operate in isolation.

- SAPS, schools, social services, NGOs, and faith groups often do not coordinate, and
- Information, resources, and interventions are fragmented.

Principle: Integrated, localised coordination is essential.

Way forward:

We may have to consider these to increase our effectiveness and impact:

- Local safety hubs,
- Multi-sector task teams, and
- Shared data and accountability structures.

Community governance and local ownership

Top-down solutions often fail because they ignore lived realities.

- Communities must participate in decision-making, not just consultation,
- Strengthen Community Policing Forums (CPFs) and grassroots leadership, and
- Recognise informal and faith-based leadership structures.

Principle: Nothing about communities without communities.

This requires honest and courageous conversations about the state of affairs on the local level. We will have to critically evaluate what has been happening in our communities and within legitimate structures with reference to infiltration and abuse by party political and criminal networks. We all refer to how local communities organised and mobilised in the past, but we are definitely experiencing major shifts in communities' appetite for activism.

Prevention over reaction

We are trapped in cycles of reacting to violence instead of preventing it.

- Invest in early childhood development,
- Strengthen schools as safe spaces,
- Provide alternatives for youth: sport, arts, skills, employment, and
- Build healthy families and family structures.

Principle: Prevention is more powerful, and more economical, than enforcement.

Evidence is that gangs are recruiting children at a very young age. Children are continually and consistently exposed to violence to the point that violence have become normalised in our communities. Early intervention and prevention programmes need to be strengthened and expanded.

Addressing trauma and healing

Violence is both caused by trauma and produces trauma.

- Generational trauma fuels cycles of violence,

- Continuous Traumatic Stress (CTS) is real,
- Communities need psychosocial support and healing spaces, and
- Faith communities have a critical role here.

Principle: Healing is a security strategy.

This aspect cannot be over-emphasised. Our nation is deeply traumatised with layers upon layers of trauma in individuals, families and communities that have never been addressed or solved. There is the well-known phrase "Hurt people hurt people" that refers to the fact that unresolved pain and trauma in individuals often result in them inflicting pain on others, perpetuating a cycle of toxicity and violence. I believe the challenge is to turn this phrase into something positive "healed people heal people". We will have to start somewhere and focus on training many more persons to facilitate healing processes.

Ethical and accountable policing

Communities must trust law enforcement. At the moment there is a huge trust deficit that should be dealt with urgently and decisively.

- Address corruption, brutality, and inefficiency,
- Improve visibility and responsiveness, and
- Strengthen oversight and accountability.

Principle: Legitimacy is the foundation of effective policing.

We are all hoping that the government will follow through on actions flowing



Rev Dr Llewellyn MacMaster
Screengrab, Jaap Durand Chair video, UWC

from the Madlanga Commission of Inquiry. It is clear that the rot is wide and deep with shocking revelations about corruption that has become entrenched on all levels of our police service.

Unfortunately, the corruption in the police is part of a very wider and deeper moral crisis in our country. Corruption has become so normalised that we have almost accepted it as part of our DNA. Corruption is crippling our society in a way that scares and paralyses most people. We need to revive the moral regeneration movement, but we cannot allow the government to lead this. Faith communities should be at the forefront and lead by example.

Youth at the centre

Young people are often both the most vulnerable and most targeted.

- They must be seen not as “risks” but as resources, and
- Create pathways for leadership, employment, and purpose.

Principle: No safety strategy succeeds without the youth.

I have already pointed out how gangs recruit children and youth at a very young age. They target the most vulnerable youth and exploit the reality of dire poverty and extremely high youth unemployment. The broken family and education systems, the hunger for belonging, for instant gratification, and cycles of abuse contribute to gang's easy access to young people struggling to survive and build a better future for themselves.

Civic organisations and formations are currently struggling to attract enough young people into broad-based activism. We will have to re-examine our traditional ways of activism and learn from the youth how to utilise new forms and modes of activism.

Courageous conversations

The seminar emphasises the need to surface tensions and disagreements.

- Between state and community,
- Between different community actors, and
- Around issues of power, race, and inequality.

Principle: Transformation requires honest, uncomfortable dialogue.

I remember how the late Professor Russel Botman, the first black rector and vice-chancellor of Stellenbosch University (2006–2014) introduced courageous conversations in the institution to confront the transformation challenges there. These should be intentional and focused, understanding that they are never easy, but undoubtedly necessary. It takes time, patience, and commitment.

From talk to action: Measurable commitments

Too many dialogues end without implementation. General principles include the following:

- Set clear, time-bound goals,
- Define responsibilities across sectors, and
- Monitor progress publicly.

Principle: Accountability turns vision into reality.

Conclusion: A moral and collective call

The crisis of crime is ultimately a moral crisis, of neglect, inequality, and broken relationships.

The way forward demands:

- Moral courage from leaders,
- Active citizenship from communities,
- Accountability from the state, and
- Compassion and presence from faith communities.

This is not only about reducing crime. It is about rebuilding the social fabric.

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Coda: Gangsterism and dysfunction in the Western Cape

The seminar, “Gangsterism and dysfunction in the Western Cape”, co-hosted by the Jaap Durand Chair and the Gender, Trans-formation, Worldmaking Research Chair at the University of the Western Cape, and in association with the Cape Crime Crises Coalition, offers a deeply textured and multi-dimensional account of a crisis that is at once social, historical, ethical, and institutional. Across its five sessions and concluding reflections, the contributions collectively move beyond conventional understandings of crime to present gangsterism as a manifestation of systemic dysfunction. What emerges is not only a diagnosis of a deeply entrenched problem, but also a set of principles and pathways for transformation. When read as a whole, the seminar presentations trace a movement from framing and naming the crisis, through

analysing institutional failure and social fragmentation, toward envisioning collaboration, identifying agents of change, and outlining a way forward grounded in justice and collective responsibility. This overview broadly summarises the proceedings of the seminar, followed by an abbreviated account in notation format.

I

At the heart of the seminar lies a fundamental reframing: gangsterism is not simply a matter of criminal behaviour, but the outcome of interlocking structural conditions. The opening session sets the tone by asking whether there is a crisis at all, and if so, what kind of crisis it is. The answer that emerges is unequivocal. There is indeed a crisis of gangsterism in the Western Cape, but it is not only reducible to

rising crime rates or isolated acts of violence. Rather, it must be understood as a crisis of social dysfunction, rooted in inequality, institutional weakness, and fractured community life. This framing is ethically significant. It shifts responsibility away from individualised blame and toward a broader societal complicity in producing the conditions under which gangsterism flourishes.

One of the most compelling insights offered in this regard is the notion of a “pipeline” into gangsterism. The transition from school dropout to criminal involvement is not accidental but structurally patterned. Young people who fall out of the education system are not simply lost; they are absorbed into environments where vulnerability is exploited and criminal pathways are normalised. This process is also gendered, with young men often drawn into gangs and young women facing early pregnancy and socio-economic marginalisation. Both trajectories lead to exclusion from formal economic participation, reinforcing cycles of poverty and violence. The implication is stark: a society that allows such predictable outcomes cannot claim neutrality. It is, in effect, implicated in reproducing the very violence it seeks to combat.

This systemic perspective is reinforced by a rethinking of how violence itself is understood. Rather than locating violence in inherently deviant individuals, it is reframed as something that spreads through social environments. Individuals are shaped by contexts of poverty, trauma, and exposure to violence, and their actions cannot be separated from these conditions. This shift in perspective has important ethical consequences. It challenges stigmatising narratives that reduce people to their criminal identities and instead opens up the

possibility of intervention through care, prevention, and social support.

II

The seminar further deepens this analysis by situating gangsterism within a broader historical framework. The second session makes clear that the roots of gangsterism in the Western Cape extend far beyond contemporary conditions. They are embedded in a long history of social dislocation, beginning with colonial forms of control and intensifying under apartheid. Forced removals, particularly from areas such as District Six, disrupted established communities and relocated them to the peripheries of the city. These processes did not simply move people; they dismantled social networks, eroded systems of accountability, and created environments characterised by mistrust and competition over scarce resources.

At the same time, the prison system played a critical role in shaping gang culture. The emergence of the “Numbers gangs” established a durable subcultural framework that continues to influence both prison and street gangs. These organisations developed complex codes, hierarchies, and rituals that provided a sense of identity and belonging in contexts of marginalisation. Over time, these subcultures migrated beyond prison walls, embedding themselves in community life and contributing to the institutionalisation of gangsterism.

The late twentieth century saw further transformations, as gangs became increasingly organised and economically sophisticated. The expansion of drug markets and access to firearms in the 1980s facilitated the transition from loosely organised groups to structured criminal enterprises. The post-1994 democratic transition, while expanding political

freedoms, also created new opportunities for gangs to reorganise and diversify their activities. In this sense, gangsterism is not static but adaptive, evolving in response to changing social and political conditions.

Against this backdrop, the limitations of state responses become evident. The seminar consistently highlights the inadequacy of approaches that rely primarily on policing and enforcement. While such measures may produce short-term reductions in violence, they fail to address the underlying conditions that sustain gangsterism. Military deployments, for example, may temporarily suppress violence, but their effects dissipate once they are withdrawn. Similarly, legislative frameworks and specialised police units are undermined by poor coordination, corruption, and a lack of strategic coherence.

More fundamentally, law-and-order approaches misdiagnose the nature of the problem. By focusing on visible acts of crime, they overlook the deeper structures of organised criminal networks, including their financial systems, social embeddedness, and ideological cohesion. They also fail to engage with the cultural dimensions of gangsterism, which cannot be dismantled through enforcement alone. In some cases, these approaches reproduce historical patterns of exclusion, reinforcing spatial segregation and stigmatisation rather than promoting integration and development.

III

The third session of the seminar builds on this critique by examining failures within the state and criminal justice system more directly. Here, gangsterism is framed as emerging at the intersection of historical design, institutional weakness, and social fragmentation. The state is characterised not by a coherent strategy but by fragmentation,

under-resourcing, and a loss of legitimacy. Governance is undermined by siloed interventions, weak coordination across departments, and persistent corruption. The inability to control the flow of firearms and drugs further exacerbates the problem, pointing to systemic weaknesses in regulation and enforcement.

Importantly, the seminar also highlights a relational dimension of state failure. Trust between communities and institutions has been eroded, making cooperation difficult and undermining the effectiveness of interventions. In this context, even well-intentioned policies struggle to gain traction. The problem is not only what the state does, but how it is perceived. Without legitimacy, authority becomes fragile and contested.

In contrast to these institutional weaknesses, community and faith-based organisations emerge as crucial actors. They are not merely supplementary to state efforts but central to any meaningful response. These organisations possess moral authority, local knowledge, and relational networks that enable them to operate in ways that the state cannot. They create spaces for dialogue, mediate conflicts, and provide support for individuals and families affected by violence. They also play a key role in addressing trauma, which is both a cause and consequence of gangsterism.

Youth organisations are identified as particularly important, though often under-resourced and marginalised. Young people are not only the primary targets of gang recruitment but also potential agents of change. However, their capacity to organise and lead is constrained by a lack of support and opportunities. Recognising and resourcing youth agency is therefore essential to breaking cycles of violence.

The question of community governance emerges as a significant point of

convergence. Across the contributions, there is a growing recognition that alternative forms of governance are already taking shape at the grassroots level. Street committees, neighbourhood watches, and informal safety networks represent forms of “governance from below” that challenge the monopoly of the state over security. These initiatives are rooted in local knowledge and collective accountability, offering a different model of safety based on participation and mutual care. However, they also face challenges, including resource constraints and internal inequalities, and must be supported and integrated into broader strategies.

IV

The fourth session shifts the focus to the dynamics of collaboration, highlighting the role of competing interests, entrenched assumptions, and institutional silos. One of the key insights here is that fragmentation is not accidental but structural. Different actors – state agencies, municipalities, civil society organisations, businesses, and communities – operate according to distinct mandates, priorities, and incentives. While each of these interests is legitimate, their misalignment creates barriers to effective cooperation.

Compounding this problem are deeply ingrained assumptions about “the other”. Institutions and communities often view each other through lenses of mistrust and misrecognition. Police may see communities as uncooperative, while communities perceive police as unaccountable or indifferent. Civil society organisations may be viewed as idealistic, while government departments are seen as bureaucratic and unresponsive. These assumptions obscure the complexities of each actor’s position and reinforce divisions.

Breaking through these silos requires more than improved coordination; it demands a fundamental shift in how relationships are understood. Collaboration must move from being episodic and reactive to being structured, sustained, and integrated. The concept of co-design is particularly significant in this regard. It emphasises the need to bring together diverse actors in a process of joint problem-solving, where strategies are developed collectively rather than imposed from above. This approach challenges traditional hierarchies and calls for a more egalitarian and participatory model of governance.

The conditions for genuine collaboration are both practical and ethical. They include clarity of roles, shared objectives, consistent communication, and mechanisms for accountability. Equally important are trust, courage, and a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths. Collaboration is not simply a technical exercise but a normative project, requiring a reimagining of the relationships between state, society, and community.

V

The final session builds on these insights by focusing on agents of change and available resources. A key finding is that the problem is not a lack of resources per se, but their misallocation and misrecognition. Significant funds are directed toward policing and security, while community-based initiatives remain under-resourced. At the same time, the knowledge and capacities that exist within communities are often overlooked or undervalued.

Communities themselves are identified as primary agents of change. Far from being passive victims, they are actively engaged in producing safety through everyday practices of care and vigilance. Civil society and faith-

based organisations provide additional layers of support, offering moral leadership and fostering social cohesion. The state, while indispensable, must shift its role from one of control to one of enabling and partnering.

The seminar's concluding reflections synthesise these insights into a set of principles for moving forward. Central among these is the need to shift from a narrow focus on crime control to a broader commitment to social justice. Safety cannot be separated from issues of inequality, dignity, and opportunity. This shift requires a whole-of-society approach, in which responsibility is shared across sectors and communities are actively involved in shaping solutions.

VI

Breaking institutional silos, strengthening community governance, prioritising prevention, addressing trauma, and placing youth at the centre are all identified as critical components of this new approach. Equally important is the need for ethical and accountable policing, which can rebuild trust and legitimacy. The emphasis on courageous conversations highlights the importance of dialogue in addressing deep-seated tensions and divisions.

Perhaps most importantly, the seminar calls for a move from dialogue to action. Too often, discussions of gangsterism remain at the level of analysis, without translating into concrete change. The emphasis on measurable commitments and accountability reflects a recognition that transformation requires sustained effort and clear benchmarks.

In terms of what has been achieved, the seminar represents a significant step forward in several respects. It has produced a comprehensive and integrated

understanding of gangsterism, bringing together diverse perspectives into a coherent framework. It has shifted the framing of the problem, highlighting its systemic and ethical dimensions. It has identified key principles and pathways for intervention, providing a foundation for future action. It has also surfaced critical tensions and challenges, creating space for more honest and effective engagement.

Above all, the seminar has initiated a process of collective reflection and dialogue that can inform ongoing efforts to address gangsterism in the Western Cape. While the challenges remain formidable, the insights generated through this process offer a basis for hope. They point toward the possibility of a more just, collaborative, and effective approach to safety, one that recognises the complexity of the problem while affirming the capacity of communities, institutions, and individuals to work together in transforming it.

The rubrics below answer the respective questions: "What were the underlying themes emerging from the seminar, what are the key findings of the seminar, what is the way forward, and what has been achieved?"

VI

What were the underlying themes emerging from the seminar?

A first and most dominant theme is the *reframing of gangsterism as social dysfunction rather than mere criminality*. Across all sessions, contributors emphasise that gangsterism cannot be reduced to individual deviance or isolated criminal acts. Instead, it is embedded in a wider ecology of structural inequality, poverty, spatial injustice, and institutional breakdown. Violence is thus symptomatic of deeper failures in social organisation, governance, and moral community.

Closely related is the theme of *historical continuity and structural causation*. Gangsterism is shown to be rooted in colonial and apartheid legacies, particularly forced removals, spatial segregation, and the erosion of community networks. These historical processes continue to shape present realities, producing intergenerational cycles of marginalisation, trauma, and exclusion.

A third key theme is *systemic fragmentation*. The seminar repeatedly highlights the disjuncture between state institutions, civil society, and communities. Government departments operate in silos, civil society is uneven and sometimes exclusionary, and communities themselves are internally divided. This fragmentation weakens collective responses and allows organised crime to operate with greater coherence than the state.

Another important theme is the *failure of law-and-order paradigms*. While policing is recognised as necessary, it is consistently shown to be insufficient when deployed in isolation. Militarised interventions, reactive policing, and punitive justice systems fail to address the underlying drivers of gangsterism and, in some cases, reproduce the very conditions they seek to resolve.

The seminar also foregrounds *the centrality of community, relationality, and social fabric*. Communities are not merely sites of violence but also spaces of resilience, knowledge, and agency. Informal networks, faith-based organisations, and grassroots initiatives play a crucial role in maintaining safety and social cohesion, even under conditions of extreme strain.

A further theme is *the ethical dimension of the crisis*. Gangsterism reflects not only empirical realities (violence, crime, inequality) but also normative breakdowns, such as failures of care, justice, dignity, and

responsibility. The crisis is therefore as much moral as it is structural.

Finally, there is a strong emphasis on *youth, identity, and belonging*. Young people are both the most vulnerable to gang recruitment and the most critical agents of change. Gangs are understood as providing identity, recognition, and economic opportunity in contexts where legitimate institutions have failed to do so.

VII

What are the key findings of the seminar?

From these themes, several key findings can be distilled.

First, *gangsterism is systemic and adaptive*. It operates as part of a broader ecosystem that includes economic, social, and political dimensions. Criminal networks are often more organised, responsive, and embedded than state institutions, allowing them to endure and evolve.

Second, *the state is characterised by both structural and operational failure*. Structurally, it has failed to address inequality, spatial injustice, and economic exclusion. Operationally, it suffers from poor coordination, inadequate resources, corruption, and a lack of trust with communities. Importantly, this failure is not only about capacity but also about orientation, misrecognising gangsterism as primarily a policing issue.

Third, *law enforcement alone cannot resolve the crisis*. Policing strategies tend to focus on visible crime rather than underlying systems, producing short-term gains without long-term impact. Prisons often reinforce gang networks, and militarised interventions provide only temporary relief.

Fourth, *gangsterism fulfils functional roles in marginalised contexts*. It provides protection, belonging, identity, and economic

opportunity. Any effective intervention must therefore address these underlying needs rather than simply suppress gang activity.

Fifth, *community and faith-based organisations are indispensable actors*. They possess moral authority, local knowledge, and relational networks that are inaccessible to the state. They play key roles in mediation, social cohesion, trauma healing, and youth development.

Sixth, *youth marginalisation is central to the reproduction of gangsterism*. High levels of unemployment, school dropout, and social exclusion create a “pipeline” into gangs. Without meaningful alternatives, young people are drawn into criminal economies.

Seventh, *collaboration is currently weak and often superficial*. While there is widespread recognition of the need for partnership, efforts are undermined by competing interests, mistrust, and institutional silos. “Collaboration” often remains rhetorical.

Eighth, *trust deficit is a critical barrier*. Communities distrust law enforcement due to corruption and lack of accountability, while institutions often misrecognise communities as uncooperative. This mutual suspicion undermines collective action.

VIII

What is the way forward?

The seminar offers a comprehensive and principled vision for moving forward, grounded in both practical and ethical considerations.

At its core is the need to *shift from crime control to social justice*. Sustainable safety cannot be achieved without addressing poverty, inequality, and spatial injustice. This requires a broader conception of safety that includes dignity, opportunity, and belonging.

A second principle is *whole-of-society responsibility*. Crime prevention cannot be left to the state alone. Government, civil society,

faith communities, businesses, families, and communities must all play active and coordinated roles. Safety must be co-produced rather than outsourced.

Third, *breaking institutional silos is essential*. This involves creating integrated, localised structures such as safety hubs, multi-sector task teams, and shared data systems. Coordination must replace fragmentation.

Fourth, the seminar emphasises *community governance and local ownership*. Effective interventions must be grounded in lived realities and involve communities as active decision-makers. Grassroots structures such as street committees and community policing forums should be strengthened and resourced.

Fifth, there is a strong call for *prevention over reaction*. Investment in early childhood development, education, family support, and youth programmes is more effective and sustainable than reactive enforcement.

Sixth, *addressing trauma and promoting healing* is identified as a central strategy. Violence is both caused by and produces trauma, creating self-reinforcing cycles. Psychosocial support and healing processes are therefore critical components of any intervention.

Seventh, *ethical and accountable policing* is required to rebuild trust. This includes addressing corruption, improving responsiveness, and strengthening oversight. Legitimacy, rather than force, is the foundation of effective policing.

Eighth, *youth must be placed at the centre*. Interventions must create pathways for education, employment, leadership, and participation, recognising young people as assets rather than risks.

Ninth, the seminar calls for *courageous conversations*. Addressing gangsterism requires confronting uncomfortable issues, including power, inequality, race, and institutional failure.

Finally, there is a need to *translate dialogue into action*. This involves setting measurable

goals, defining responsibilities, and ensuring accountability across all sectors.

IX

What has been achieved?

While the seminar is primarily diagnostic and forward-looking, it has already achieved several significant outcomes.

First, it has *produced a coherent, interdisciplinary understanding of gangsterism*. By integrating perspectives from academia, law enforcement, civil society, and faith communities, it has moved the discourse beyond fragmented and sector-specific analyses.

Second, it has *shifted the framing of the problem*. Gangsterism is no longer treated merely as a criminal issue but as a systemic crisis rooted in social dysfunction, historical injustice, and institutional failure. This reframing has important implications for policy and practice.

Third, the seminar has *identified key principles for intervention*. These include social justice, collaboration, prevention, community governance, and youth-centred approaches. These principles provide a foundation for future strategies.

Fourth, it has *highlighted existing resources and capacities*, particularly within communities and civil society. By recognising these assets, the seminar challenges deficit-based narratives and opens up new possibilities for action.

Fifth, it has *surfaced critical tensions and contradictions*, including competing interests, mistrust, and the limitations of current approaches. By making these visible, it

creates the conditions for more honest and effective engagement.

Sixth, it has *articulated a shared vision of collaboration*. Although challenging, the seminar outlines what genuine collaboration would require, moving beyond rhetoric to practical and ethical commitments.

Finally, it has *initiated a process of dialogue and reflection* that can inform future action. By bringing together diverse stakeholders and fostering critical engagement, it lays the groundwork for ongoing collaboration and transformation.

X

The seminar presents a rich, multi-layered analysis of gangsterism in the Western Cape, moving beyond narrow criminological explanations toward a broader social, ethical, historical, and political understanding. While the seminar demonstrates that the crisis of gangsterism in the province is profound, complex, and deeply rooted, it also shows that it is not intractable. By reframing the problem, identifying systemic failures, and articulating a principled and collaborative way forward, the seminar makes a significant contribution to both understanding and addressing this crisis. Across all five sessions and the concluding reflections, a coherent set of underlying themes, key findings, forward-looking proposals, and concrete achievements emerges. What emerges most clearly is that meaningful change will require more than technical solutions. It demands a fundamental reimagining of the relationship between state, society, and community, one grounded in justice, collaboration, and shared responsibility.

Gangsterism and Social Dysfunction in the Western Cape brings together the proceedings of a Jaap Durand Chair Seminar held on 18 March 2026 at the University of the Western Cape. The event was jointly sponsored by the Jaap Durand Chair and the Research Chair in Gender, Transformation and World-making in the Faculty of Law at the University of the Western Cape in association with the Cape Crime Crisis Coalition. The *JDC Opinion and Review Series* draws on concise position papers addressing topical issues, originally presented as part of the Jaap Durand Chair Seminars.

The contributions in this volume appear against the backdrop of persistent gang violence, rising fatalities, and the continued expansion of organised crime in the Western Cape. Collectively, they bear witness to gangsterism as the product of a complex interplay of forces, including entrenched poverty, deepening inequality, the enduring legacies of colonial and apartheid injustice, and pervasive social neglect, particularly of young people. The essays gathered here offer incisive analyses and sustained reflections on a phenomenon that remains both deeply troubling and profoundly consequential.

"Our role as a university is to create space for serious public engagement. It is to support evidence-informed dialogue and to connect academic work to the realities people live with. Universities carry a social responsibility to engage meaningfully with the communities they serve. That understanding is especially relevant here. For the University of the Western Cape, it confirms that part of our public role is to convene difficult conversations with honesty and care."

Robert J. Balfour

Rector and Vice-Chancellor, University of the Western Cape



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